

THE
STONER-FAMILY
BY
SAMUEL FULTON



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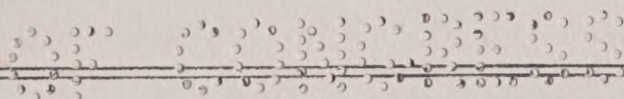
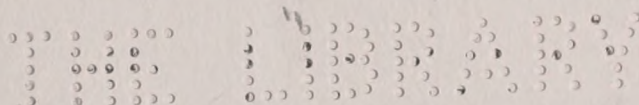
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SAMUEL FULTON



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WILLIAM
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THE STONER FAMILY.

I.

REGENT STREET in the outskirts of Boston, was not a handsome street or even a genteel street, but it was perfectly respectable. Mrs. Birdseye, who lives at No. 520, is a perfectly respectable woman with nothing in the world to worry her, and yet it was enough to worry any lady who had a proper regard for the proprieties of life, to see that daughter of Mrs. Stoner, who lived opposite, go out every day of her life at half past two, regular as a kitchen clock, and join a young man round the corner, from whence they both disappeared and nothing more was seen of them for some two hours, when they returned and separated at the same corner.

From where Mrs. Birdseye sat at her window—which was her sole occupation during the hours of daylight—she could see plainly enough down the cross street; and in fact many of her neighbors had witnessed this little daily affair, being specially invited by Mrs. Birdseye.

The young man was good looking and exceedingly well dressed, in truth they all declared a perfect gentleman, and perhaps it might be all right as far as he

was concerned;—but the conduct of that young girl—they had no patience with her. It was most disgraceful and her mother ought to be told of it.

Now we must not blame these old ladies too severely. We all judge our neighbors, and who of us can say we always put the best construction on their actions. We can only see and understand a small part of what is going on, and yet from these fragments we construct the whole history, judge and condemn them without mercy.

Why, it was only a short time ago that Charlie Wheatly, a most estimable young man and a student of divinity, was tried and condemned by all the old ladies in the street where his worthy father lived. To help along he secured a place as assistant night editor on that great daily, "The Truth-teller," for the summer. Poor fellow, he had to leave the house every evening at eight, and never reached home again until near morning. How his sisters admired and praised him for his faithful labors; but what more natural for these respectable ladies witnessing his nightly departure and kept awake listening for his return than to be shocked at such goings on. It was understood all round his habits were awful—the bishop ought to know of it. Why did Policeman A roar with laughter when appealed to, as the guardian of the public peace, to put a stop to such disgraceful conduct? No wonder these old ladies were disturbed.

See now, how easy it is to be mistaken, and what looks so very wrong to Mrs. Birdseye and her friends, may be very harmless and even proper conduct on the part of that young lady.

Yes, we who know her so well, know she is incapable of a wrong action. She is only doing her duty, in taking her daily walks, for is it not the duty of every young lady, depending in great part on her own labors for her own and her mother's support, to take the best care of her health? If a young person has to teach all morning, is it not both wise and necessary to go out every afternoon to get a breath of fresh air? If her cousin finds his time hang very heavy on his hands and the world very tiresome to live in, is it not the duty of Miss Helen to help him pass the afternoon when there is absolutely nothing for him to do? A young man of leisure can ride in the mornings and there are many things he can find to do at night, but it's hard to get through the afternoon.

And if by reason of her mother's age and infirmities of health, and temper, and especially her profound hatred of Nephew Edward, she would have been angered by a knowledge of these walks, was it not her daughter's duty to save her from anything distressful?

If her mother hated this young man and his father also (her brother-in-law), had she not good reasons for it? Did not Uncle Amos, of the great firm of Amos Stoner & Co., cheat, yes, cheat her husband out of all his wealth, and when the poor man died, leaving his widow and only child a mere pittance, did not this robber offer them a trifling annuity in charity, and in the most insulting manner? How many times a day did poor Helen hear all the details of these transactions?

But somehow she did not hate her cousin as she was called upon to do. As she scarcely knew her uncle, even

by sight, she was willing to follow her mother's command and hate him. Did he not treat his own son and only child with neglect and contempt. Certainly he furnished him with boarding and clothes, but as for a kind word or a friendly look, it was unknown in that dreary old mansion where father and son lived alone with the servants.

What would that old man have thought or done if he had known his son was running after his cousin every day. A girl without a dollar, and with that horrible old witch of a mother.

There was no love lost between these old people. All this bad blood and hard feelings was brought about by money. Incredible as it may appear, money has been known before to make hatred and trouble among relations.

We don't pretend to know the truth of these stories. Whether there was cheating and unfair dealings, or only the misfortunes common to the lot of most who adventure in business! It was very plain that the pride of wealth, and the pride of poverty, was driving these young people apart; but something stronger was drawing them together. Were they lovers?

Certainly not! would you expect love to be introduced in the very first chapter? There will be plenty of that we promise you before we get through; besides, the young gentleman was quite too much in love with himself to have any of the tender passion to spare. But did she love her cousin?

We hope she had too much self-respect to give her love unasked. It would be a sore thing indeed to add

unrequited love to all her other trials. It had been her lot to pass through life in self-denying poverty, having but a dim remembrance of the days of their prosperity; but she had fought the battle with cheerful courage. Her mother's fretful temper was not the least of her trials, but duty, love, and patience, can bear even that. If troubles are still to attend her through life she will be able to ward off and weaken their attacks. If, perhaps, peace and happiness are in store for her, they will be all the sweeter, and she will know how to enjoy them to the full.

We love and admire these dear creatures so we would like to write a work great enough to put them all in. How they adore papa—love mamma—admire their elder brothers—bear with the nagging of the young ones. If ease and comfort abound how they bloom out and enjoy all the delights that wealth can bestow. If poverty attend, they bravely take up their burdens without complaint. Their gentle souls are solaced by all the comforts of religion, their pure spirits learn to begin heaven while yet on earth. To carry their neighbors' burdens is their constant endeavor, to soften the ills of life and spread abroad its blessings their greatest pleasure.

The men! how tall, how heavy and strong, what athletes! but, oh, how puny some of them are!

The weaker sex! how strong in patient endurance, how untiring their love!

Jones, rolling around in his arm-chair, is immensely tickled at all this. He knows a woman, etc., etc. We are not speaking of your wife, Jones. She is in great

part what you have made her. Our thoughts turn away back to that sweet innocent girl you took from her happy home, twenty years ago. If changes have come over her, please to consider, sir, how you have fulfilled the solemn vows you made on that memorable morning.

* * * * *

But while our young friends are taking their daily walks and pursuing the artless pleasures of youth, of which we hope the reader has or will have full share, great events are transpiring in the city—panic is holding high carnival—money is tight, and as usual in such cases, has hid itself away out of danger—great houses are rocking to their foundations, and financial ruin staring many in the face.

The two old gentlemen closeted in the dark back office in anxious consultation are not twins, as might be supposed from their close resemblance to each other. One is Amos Stoner himself, of the great firm of Amos Stoner & Co., the other is only his ancient and confidential clerk, McClun, whose long association with his principal, and careful imitation, has made him a strict counterpart.

“Well, McClun, it looks squally, that’s a fact; couldn’t have struck us more unprepared, with all our means locked up in advances on those blankets. If we don’t get that government contract to clear off the lot it——”

“My dear sir, we can never live till the money comes in from that source; too slow—must have help sooner, or it will be a tight squeeze.”

There was a long silence.

“Do you give it up, McClun?”

“I don’t, Mr. Stoner, I have one more plan. There’s no use in trying to get a dollar more of discount out of any bank in this city—must try private capitalists. I’ve been thinking there’s old Carker’s sister; she has plenty of ready cash, and handles all her own business.”

“Yes, and she knows how to hang on to her ready cash, unless she has good security.”

“Well, sir, the blankets with storage certificates would be a fair security.”

“She wouldn’t touch them, McClun. Your plan is naught.”

There was another long silence, then McClun resumed.

“I’ve heard she’s very sweet on our young Mr. Edward.”

“You’re crazy, McClun, she’s old enough to be his mother, and nothing but a cash bag.”

“You’re mistaken; she’s quite sentimental, away from her office. I have reason to know she’s quite fond of attention from gentlemen, and I don’t think her age would affect the value of her check, say for two hundred and fifty thousand. I believe I could manage that end of the line, but the trouble would be with Mr. Edward, he would kick heavy, although she’s not bad looking.”

“Make your mind easy on that score. My son does as I say. If you think you have a fighting chance with her, for heaven’s sake don’t lose a moment. Call in a typewriter and get off a proposal at once.”

“Without consulting Mr. Edw——?”

The old gentleman rises in a rage.

Mr. McClun, dictating—

“MY DEAR MISS CARKER,—

“We beg to advise you as an old friend that we have this day admitted our son, Edward, as full member of the firm.”

“Stop, McClun, what is that you are saying?”

“It will only cost sixty cents for the advertisement—and we must do something to please him, I assure you; besides it adds to his position and helps the chance of success.”

Dictating—

“And we take this occasion to assure you of our most distinguished regard, and desire for closer personal and business connection with so famous a business woman.

“We therefore beg to offer you our son in marriage.”

“Wait a minute, McClun. Isn’t that too abrupt?”

“Not a bit of it, sir. You can’t fool her, and may as well come out with it plain.”

Dictating—

“At the present moment some ready cash would be most useful in our business, for which we can offer you good security.

“Wishing to receive a favorable reply,

“We remain,

“AMOS STONER & Co.”

The Stoner Family.

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“Good, McClun—send it round by one of the clerks, and let him wait for an answer.”

The bearer brought back a prompt reply from that excellent business woman.

Boston, ——

“MESSRS. AMOS STONER & Co.”

“Gentlemen,—

“Y’r val’d fav. even date duly rec’d—cont’s noted—beg to advise much pleased—flattering proposal.—Regret no time at present—give subject consideration importance demands. If give me firm option—thirty days—can send Mr. Edward house this evening—discuss details.—Hoping subject can be arranged—mutual satisfaction—beg to remain—great respect.

“Mo. cb’t sv’t,

“EMILY CARKER.”

“P. S.—No trouble about cash—if Edward and self can close the deal.

“E. C.”

The two old gentlemen were delighted with this letter.

“What a woman, McClun! What a blessing to any young man to secure such a wife.”

“Yes, if he only fancies her.”

“Fancy!—Great Scott—I thought we were talking business, fancy! Send for Edward at once and let him understand the whole matter fully. He can go up this

evening and close the deal, as that dear woman says. What an angel, McClun! What a gold mine! What a member of the firm she'd make."

"Another point, sir, since Mr. Edward is a member of the firm, we'll send him out to Chicago to put in the bids on that government contract."

"Well but——"

"Oh, I'll arrange the whole matter. He'll only have to represent the firm and sign the papers."

"Very well, but see he don't have a chance to get into any muddle, for he's but a shiftless fool, and thinks that good looks and good clothes will carry him through the world."

"Well, sir, if it carries him into Miss Carker's money box we'll forgive him, ha! ha!"

It was the first laugh heard in those quarters for many a day. Let us hope it is an omen of good luck. Edward arrived in haste, prepared for the worst, but great was his relief to find his crabbed old friend in high good humor. He was quickly informed of his admission into the firm, and of all the honors and profits to follow, and then McClun gently approached the other subject. The old clerk was by no means so certain of submission as his principal. He had heard in his seventy years of life of sons disobeying their fathers.

"Another point I'll mention, Mr. Edward, now you're of age and a member of the firm—you ought—in fact—yes—no man can attain his full measure until he has—in fact—made a good marriage."

Edward was amused at this ancient bachelor advocating matrimony. His thoughts quickly ran out to his

sweet cousin, feeling instinctively she would be very far from the kind of wife that would please McClun or his father.

He laughed a little, ready to humor the joke, unaware of the gulf that was yawning beneath him.

"You mean, of course, by a good match, McClun, a rich one."

"Of course—of course. You're your father's own son," replied McClun, smiling all over and relieved to find how easy it was to make himself understood by this sensible young man.

"You see it's just this way, Edward, a young man has just two chances of success. If he slaves and saves all his life, he may die rich, or if he is wise enough to take advantage of the labors of preceding generations, he can marry rich. In the first case he leaves to his heirs the enjoyment of his hard earned cash;—in the second he has the pleasure of spending himself. I leave you to judge, Mr. Edward, which is the best fun.

"Speaking of rich marriages, there's Miss Carker, worth a million, sir, or perhaps two. What a business woman she is; what a splendid wife she'd make. Lucky young man who secures that prize."

"Young man?"

"Yes, sir, young man. That's the kind she wants. And by the way, one of the firm must see her at her house to-night on business. Go up and attend to it and strike right in promptly for this wonderful prize—how your father would be delighted! and then the loan, you know—we're hard up, Edward, that's a fact, and must have a large amount of ready cash; and so the old clerk

went into details—mixing up business—blankets—loans—securities—wealth and marriage, to such an extent the young man went off on his mission completely mystified: which was about what McClun wanted, for he dared not put the whole scheme in plain English. He must just trust to luck and Miss Carker.

Edward, as he rang at Miss Carker's door, had a confused notion, that a man to live comfortably must die rich, and Miss Carker had everything in the world to make a man happy excepting blankets.

He was received with flattering attention by that interesting female, arrayed in youthful attire selected from the wardrobes of her foremothers.

Poor Edward! the startling appearance of Miss Carker completed his confusion, and the more she smiled and smirked at him, the more he was overcome. Finding himself sinking every minute deeper into this sea of confusion he plunged boldly into business.

“Miss Carker, I called round this evening—in fact McClun—you know he thought—in short we're awful hard up for cash—he wanted—was it two hundred and fifty dollars—or something—he said you were the old girl to draw the check. Oh, excuse me,” blushing with fright, “only his joke, you know. He said you'd want warm security, and so would be pleased with blankets—yes——”

“Oh, he said I'd want warm security, did he? Well, it'll be a cold day before he can fool the old girl,” and she gave him a glance keen and sharp enough to draw twenty per cent. out of granite. Then noticing the young man looked anxiously round at the door as if he

meditated bolting, she was all smiles and simpers again.

"Never mind McClun, my dear sir, but to come back to your own wishes; I understand you want to marry at once and, being your father's son, of course the first consideration is cash;" and she smiled and shook her curls.

"Yes, Miss Carker," replied the young man in a state of increasing imbecility, "that's it, I want a loan and a wife and we'll give the blankets as collateral."

"Ha! ha! I see you're fond of a joke, but to come right down to business I think you'll suit me, and although I've a thirty days' option I won't keep you in suspense but accept your proposal at once."

Edward gave a gasp and a jump that made his chair crack.

What did the old thing mean, was she joking, or would she send out for a clergyman and marry him out of hand?

The extremity of his position restored somewhat his presence of mind. Fright sharpened his wits. He must find some escape from this awful position. It was plain she didn't fancy the blankets as security. He must cover his retreat with blankets.

"Oh, Miss Carker, you're most considerate! but about the blankets, you know—I mean about the loan—McClun—office—waiting—yes." He felt he was fast sinking in the mire again.

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't like the security, but I won't drive a hard bargain with you; so you may tell McClun the check is ready for him any day."

"Oh, Miss Carker, I'm so relieved."

“Yes, Edward, say to McClun the check is ready any day—after the wedding.”

Great heavens! she must be in earnest,—he fled.—There was nothing else to be done.

* * * * *

Poor McClun—it was hard—a clergyman—a ten-dollar bill—and a half an hour's time, would raise all the money needed—and yet—oh dear, what fools these young men are.

There was nothing left but to send Edward promptly off to Chicago to close up that government contract, and get rid of the dreadful blankets in that way.

Relieved from this frightful danger Edward's spirits rose, and he could hardly wait until the next afternoon to pour into the ears of his faithful confidant, the story of his great advancement. A full member of the firm, and ordered to Chicago on business of great importance.

Mrs. Birdseye, who witnessed their meeting and parting, saw at once that something of importance was impending, and hurried round to impart the tidings to Mrs. Quick.

“Now, you mark my words, Sara Quick, 'e 'ave raised the cash and they elope this night, as I'm a livin' woman. Don't tell me! I see it the hinstant I set heyes hon 'im.” We don't know what Mrs. Birdseye saw from her window, we were not there, but we know that Edward was greatly excited at the world suddenly opened before him and of course poor Helen was painfully affected at this sudden and unexpected parting from her only friend.

We can only hope these cousins didn't expose themselves in the public street.

* * * * *

Alas! alas! who of us can forecast the future? In ten days the great house of Amos Stoner & Co. was a wreck—the head of the firm dead from the shock—and the young partner lodged in prison in Chicago.

Poor Edward. He hadn't the least idea what it was all about, but he understood clearly enough from McClun's letter, that father and fortune were both gone and he left, worse than in poverty, to get out of jail and make his way in the world as best he could.

II.

“ Boston, ——

“ DEAREST EDWARD,—

“ How sudden, how shocking it all is. Poor mamma has taken to her bed which she declares she will never be able to leave. Her condition frightens me, but perhaps it is only one of her despondent spells. Day and night my heart cries over the afflictions of my poor boy. What words of comfort can I send to one sunk in such a sea of trouble? Don't despair—don't give up. Time will show you some way out of all these trials, or at least soften the blows that you may be able to bear them; and never forget, whatever happens, you have always the sympathy and love of

“ Your affectionate cousin,

“ HELEN.”

“ Chicago, ——

“ DEAREST HELEN,—

“ I received your letter in prison. I am now free, but what freedom is opened before me, only the privilege of starvation. It is all a frightful dream to me. I have no plans and don't know in the least what I am to do; but one thing is certain, you have troubles

enough of your own with your sick mother and pinching poverty. Any further connection with me would only add to your distress; you shall not sacrifice yourself with worry about me; I will not even put on you that sorest trial of anxious waiting by saying that if fortune smiles at some future time you will see me again. No, fortune will never smile on me. I will bury myself somewhere in the great West. My assumed name and address unknown: for to you I must be as dead or worse. You cannot write to me and I will never wound you by another letter. You may say this is cruel, but you cannot say it's cowardly, for it has taken the utmost courage to bring my resolution up to this point. But I know, I feel sure it is right and I must not shrink from cutting my poor fortunes loose from you.

“In the future—which I pray God may be of the happiest for you—if at any time thoughts of your lost cousin should fill your heart—think only this:—that he has deserted and forgotten you. Yes; I would rather that you should forget or even think hardly of me than any shadows of my dark fate should dim the brightness of your dear life. My mind cannot shape nor my pen write any last message of farewell to my only—my only——

“EDWARD.”

“Chicago, ——

“DEAREST HELEN,—

“I wrote you this morning from this little saloon. The young German who keeps it has been very kind to me, perhaps noticing my forlorn condition. My distress

is too new to be concealed entirely. However determined I am that your life shall not be weighted with the burdens of my misfortunes, I felt perhaps it was wrong to deny you a word of farewell. Dearest Helen, *don't* think hardly of me, *don't* forget me entirely, think of me perhaps as one who is lost and gone out of your life forever; and now a last good-by. I will wait here one week to receive one letter from you, but remember this, I cannot, must not, answer it.

“Your cousin,

“EDWARD.”

“Boston, ——

“DEAREST EDWARD,—

“I have just read your two letters, and hasten to reply by first mail. Dear mamma is very ill, and I cannot but fear the worst. If she is taken from me now I do not know what is to become of me; and indeed what with my sufferings from her sickness and now your heart-breaking letters, I am quite beside myself. You ask me to forget you because you do not wish to be burdened with the helpless poverty of a woman. That is why you send me these harsh letters, and say you will write me and see me no more. I blush to read your despairing words. You, a man in full health and strength with all the world before you, and no restraints or dependants of any kind. Yes, you will shake off even your poor cousin. But do not be afraid. I will be no burden on any man. I thought you had some

regard for me and yet from the first blow of misfortune you surrender me to my helpless fate.

“Cousin, be a man, stand up and act a man’s part. Leave it to me, a poor friendless girl, to lie down and cry if I will; but for yourself never be so faint-hearted. You say you will answer no more letters of mine. You will not have the chance. I will write you no more. Yes, I will follow your commands and forget you, and think hardly of you as I must; but I tell you this, whatever befalls me, I will not surrender in despair. No, I will bear my burdens as best I may and do my duty as God gives me strength. And yet you cannot alter the relationship or deny the fact if I was in sore need I would have the right to fly to you for aid, before begging from strangers. Do you wonder, when the doctor tells me mamma cannot last long, that my desolate position frightens me? Above all it grieves me that, after passing all these years, so closely drawn together, you should be so ready to cast me off or to deprive me of the supreme comfort of feeling that at the very worst and in the last extremity, I would always have a man to appeal to for counsel and assistance.

“Not that I want any money aid; I will always be able to take care of myself for that, but, oh, to be left alone in the great world, it terrifies me.

“You have forgotten we have an uncle in the far West. He emigrated before we were born, but mamma said he was a prosperous farmer, living near Oakland in Oregon. If I am left alone I think I will go to him. Perhaps he would grant shelter and advice to his forlorn niece. I will not say good-by. You cannot deny

me the small comfort of knowing where you are and how you are getting along; but if you do not care to hear from me I will never reply. My head is so confused. Perhaps I have not written in the right spirit. If anything is said amiss forgive me, but, oh, Edward, don't forget or forsake me. Rather bear in mind you have a cousin whose constant advice to you is to quit yourself like a man.

“Your affectionate cousin,

“HELEN.

“P. S.—I cannot let this letter go without writing away down here on the bottom of the sheet, where you can tear it off if you don't want it, I send you, dear cousin, my warmest love.

“Do not, I entreat you, deny my one request to let me hear from you frequently and say whether I may reply to you. You may be out of money. I send you a little check. It is my savings from teaching. I can spare it, indeed I can, and it would gratify me deeply if you would accept it.

“H.”

This letter brought courage to the heart of our poor hero, and with many tears he vowed he would quit himself like a man. It was worth while to be a man to win and wear the love of such a girl as that, and he would put his pride in the dirt and accept her check and write to her at least twice every year, and let her know all about himself. Perhaps he might even have some good

news to send. Especially he would write her at once and let her know how her messages of strength and love had lifted him from the depths of despair, and made him feel that all was not lost and the world was really all before him; and he had still something to live for and much to be thankful for. He would commence at once and work cheerfully at whatever he could find to do, and meet, and, if possible, overcome, all his trials with a bold front.

He sat down at once and wrote off to Helen such pages of love and high resolve, that with every line his heart was softened and courage strengthened. He said he had heard of this uncle in Oregon, and since he wanted to try his fortunes in the far West he would find him out.

As he had exhausted the little German's supply of paper, he would end by asking her forgiveness and always her love more and more; and she might expect to hear from him at least twice a year, let his luck be what it might.

This letter poor Helen found waiting for her when she returned from the funeral of her mother; and if anything could comfort her under such desolate circumstances, it was such a letter. Every line filled with noble courage and devoted love. She hardly hoped to see her cousin again, but even if in time he forgot her and his pledges of love, she was most willing to sacrifice herself if by so doing Edward could be saved from his present despair and started on a useful, and she hoped, a prosperous, career.

III.

YOUNG STONER began to make inquiries as to the best, or rather cheapest, route to Oregon. He resolved to move in that direction leisurely, looking always for something to do by which he could earn an honest living.

He was joined on this trip by a young man whose acquaintance he made in the German Inn. A gay young fellow of about his own age, but of very different temperament. He introduced himself as John Smith from New York, on his way through the world, trying to get the most pleasure for the least cost in labor and cash.

These two young men took a great fancy to each other, and it was not long before Edward, his heart being full of all his troubles, took his new friend into his confidence and told him all the history of his life; and Smith was able to cheer up Edward and put him in better spirits. When Smith had heard at large all the details of his woes, he said, "Now listen to me as a man of the world, while I let loose my opinion, and give you some solid advice. As to your father, there was no love lost between you. Why should you mourn his loss? As to the wealth, you never had the use of any of it, and so you can't miss it. It's gone—let it go. Now, as to yourself, why worry? Look at me. I'm happy as a lark twenty-four hours a day. Follow my example. I wish I knew your Cousin Helen, she's a

treasure. You shouldn't have allowed that old maid Carker to upset you in that manner. It was only a game of bluff. She had no notion of marrying you."

"There you're mistaken," replied Edward, "but I've escaped from that danger, so we'll let the subject drop."

The friends took passage on a steamboat for Duluth, but finding work promising at Eagle River—a mining and trading town on Lake Superior—concluded to make a stop at that point.

Smith obtained employment in the store of Mr. Brown, a nice little man who was delighted to secure the services of such an efficient clerk. Edward was taken into the office of a mining company some miles back from the lake.

Both were well paid and prospered, but Smith, after making love violently to the pretty daughter of his employer with doubtful success, took a dislike to the place and proposed to move on farther west. He tried to induce Stoner to go with him, but he being well satisfied with his position and prospects said no. In fact he had felt too keenly his recent desperate position without money, work or friends, to be in a hurry to risk the world again.

His heart turned longingly to Helen, his only friend in all the world. It was plain she was deeply in love with him, and if fortune ever went well with him and he found himself able to marry a poor girl, she was the one for him. But all that was in the far distance. Let fortune and the future decide the matter. His motto had always been, self first, and he now added a little to it and said, self second and last. Perhaps he was right

—who knows? The faithful follower of this plan generally gets there.

He received one day a call from little Mr. Brown and began to make inquiries about his friend Smith.

“Well!” replied Mr. Brown, “if he’s a friend of yours I’d advise you to look after him a little. He’s far too friendly with the Indians and half-breeds around here—dangerous company, and he’s too familiar with my cash drawer. I thought I’d come out and have a little talk with you about him. He’s a splendid young fellow, handsome, popular, good trader, but he should be warned away from the Indian camps, and should have a little more respect for my cash.”

“Mr. Brown,” said Edward, “I’m glad you’ve told me about all this, for I want you to understand, Smith is no particular friend of mine. I met him in Chicago and came on here with him. Of course I liked him. Who could help it? By his own account he’s been fast enough and bad enough, or as he says, he’s determined to get out of the world all it owes him; but I never took him for a common thief. I feel quite sure you are in error about the money.”

“Well, Stoner, my idea is he’s more reckless than bad and would go pretty far into any kind of thoughtless mischief, but I won’t judge him without farther trial. I’m mortal bad off for help and willing to stand a good deal to keep him. If a better salary now would help matters I have no objection. Come down next Sunday and talk it over with him. He won’t listen to me, but may stand a good word from one of his own age.”

"Mr. Brown, you can count on me. I think greatly of John, but have my doubts whether he will allow me to interfere in his affairs."

"Young Stoner, I take it kindly of you to act in this way. It will do me a good turn, and may do something to save a thoughtless young man. Ride over to dinner. My wife and daughter will be glad to have you."

Mr. Brown was a pleasant spoken little man, so polite, gentle and mild, he appeared quite out of his element so far away from civilization; but then his wife made up in every way for his deficiencies. She was his exact opposite, both physically and mentally, while the pretty Julia was a good mixture of both.

On the appointed day Edward was on hand and made the acquaintance of Mrs. and Miss Brown. Smith was one of the company, just as handsome and lively as ever. He had made every effort to draw Miss Julia into a flirtation, but she was no more than civil to him.

But Miss Julia was greatly pleased with Edward, and her gracious attention to him made Mr. Smith quite sulky and ill-tempered, so that when Edward was anxious to have a little plain talk with him after dinner and let him know how handsomely Mr. Brown was ready to deal with him, he was notified at once by Smith to keep hands off.

"All right," replied Edward. "I thought we came here as friends, and you'd be glad of a little hint from me."

"Not at all, Mr. Stoner, I don't need your hints or your attempts to get my girl away from me. I say

plainly if she fancies me, well and good. If not, and she won't come round, I'm off by the next boat. If the fair Julia will cut off with me I'm ready, or if she'll marry me here I'll stay and help the old man keep store, but if it's no go, I'm off."

Edward thought it right to acquaint Mr. Brown with his clerk's views.

"Never fear for my daughter," said the little man. "She has too much of her mother's sense and spirit to take up with a strange man."

But when Edward considered afterwards how very polite and gracious Miss Julia was to him, a perfect stranger, he thought her father's confidence misplaced.

This was the last the young men saw of each other for many a day. Smith's attentions still meeting with no favor from the fair Julia, he soon left in disgust. Edward was induced to accept the vacant position chiefly by the offer to board in Mrs. Brown's house, and the promise that the two ladies would do everything to make him comfortable. He was under the impression, from the little he had seen of the daughter, that living in the same house with her would not be disagreeable.

A few months spent in this comfortable home, and Edward began to feel at his ease, and forget all his misfortunes, but certainly he could not so soon forget his dear Cousin Helen.

Mr. Brown was a good business man, and could hold on to a penny with any one on the lakes. As for the remainder of the family affairs—was he not married? Had he not Mrs. Brown?

The new clerk gave great satisfaction to his employer.

His wife and even Miss Julia was disposed to like him. Certainly he was not as handsome as young Smith, nor as genial in his manners, nor so lively; but then he was the only available young man in the Station; besides he was certainly solid and steady. Miss Julia reserved her opinion, but was disposed to give Mr. Stoner the benefit of the doubt.

As time rolled on progress was made in arranging the affairs of our Eagle River friends. Edward felt more at home, Julia more entertaining, Mr. Brown better satisfied; but not so Mrs. Brown. She did not hesitate to inform her good man in those secret confidences of married life, that in her opinion Edward was a very fine man. But Mr. Brown took no notice, so that it at last became necessary for Mrs. Brown to take matters into her own hands.

“As I was saying, Mr. Brown, it’s a pity you are to lose young Stoner so soon.”

“What! what!” cried Brown, starting up and wide awake in a moment. “He didn’t say anything to me about leaving.”

“How stupid you are, Horace. You don’t suppose any young man is going to stay long in these wilds unless he has something special to detain him. If you’d only exert yourself in time you might make some arrangements to hold him. A young man must have home ties and all that before he’ll settle down. Now sister Ann writes me from Boston his connections are all first-class, and there’s a good chance of something handsome coming from his father’s estate after all the debts are paid off.

"Well, why should you be surprised at me? Mr. Brown, would you want a young man about your house, paying attention to your only daughter, and make *no* attempt to find out about him? I'm surprised at you, Horace."

"Well, I'm sure I never noticed his paying any attention to Julia. I think you are a little cracked on the subject of getting her settled, but if he's likely to come into any money, of course that's a different thing and I have no objection to a partnership."

"Not so fast, Mr. Brown, the partnership is reserved for your son-in-law. What do you think, dear?"

"I think, Mrs. Brown, you'd better go to sleep and not meddle in such matters. They'll work themselves out all right in time. No telling what time will bring about."

"My dear, I don't trust anything to time that I can attend to myself. At one stroke I'll secure you a valuable clerk and partner, Julia an affectionate husband, and myself a desirable son-in-law. What I say is, he needs encouragement, and Julia is too shy to give it to him. So I've made up my mind I'll stand no more delay but settle the whole business before the sun goes down to-morrow."

"Do you propose to throw your only daughter at a man's head? I thought you had more self-respect and family pride, and it's my belief you'll just make a muddle of the whole thing and frighten the young fellow off. I don't believe he's thinking about Julia or wants to be married at all."

"Then, Mr. Brown, it's high time he was thinking

about it, and evidently he needs some one to think for him."

Edward had begun to catch the Western fever, like all who emigrate to those attractive lands. He was interested in the business, satisfied with his home, and found the society of the sweet Julia very comforting. Next to Helen, of course, she was the dearest girl he had ever met. Many thoughts of Helen passed through his mind; but then she was so far away—and Julia was so near. The talks and jokes by day—the quiet walks in the evening. It was natural for this friendless young man to be drawn towards this congenial spirit. Mr. Brown thought time might work wonders.

One day Edward stood leaning against the store door, watching intently the great steamer making a hasty call at the long pier a few hundred feet away. The hands rushing about loading and unloading freight. The few passengers standing along the railing on the upper deck overlooking the busy scene. His thoughts wandered from skins and copper ore to the sweet Julia sitting near by, and from her to his dear Cousin Helen, so far away, as he supposed, on the distant shores of Massachusetts Bay. Was it because she was his only relation, that he felt at that moment she was so near and dear to him, or can there be some secret magnetism unknown to mortal ken that made him think so strongly of her at that instant, for as he looked out vacantly at the steamer and the blue lake beyond, there in plain sight on the deck stood Helen, looking over the strange scene, and distinctly taking in the view of Brown's great trading store, and a young man standing at the door.

To think that after being separated thousands of miles they should be for a space within hailing distance, and then separated again for thousands of miles.

After the death of her mother Helen had written to her Oregon uncle, and had received at once a most pressing invitation to make her home with him as long as she found it agreeable. She was now on her way across the continent, hoping at the same time to hear something of Edward.

All the time the steamer was lying at the pier the cousins stood in plain sight of each other. Presently the whistle sounded, the great vessel swung round into the lake, and increasing rapidly her speed soon disappeared around the point.

How narrowly things work sometimes! If Edward had gone down to attend to the steamer business as he generally did, the cousins would immediately have recognized each other, and great evils that presently befell in this history would have been avoided.

Mrs. Brown was of opinion that time enough had been wasted, and it was now her duty, as a good mother, to demand of Mr. Stoner his intentions. Nor must the reader be too hard on this good lady. She was a managing woman, and believed in putting everything through promptly! and besides had a mother's natural impatience to see her daughter well settled in life. Such things have been heard of before. Mothers and even relations have been anxious to have the marriage affairs of their kin brought to a successful issue, and some have even gone the length of encouraging the hesitating beaux or kindly persuading the doubtful belles.

And why not? It may be if there was more hesitation and doubts before marriage there would be more happiness afterwards. Hasty and inconsiderate marriages are always dangerous, and the advice and assistance of kind friends would never be granted to improper matches. Therefore, we say—speed the prudent match-maker.

“Mr. Edward,” said Mrs. Brown, “I don’t wonder you look sometimes so sad and lonesome.”

Edward had not been conscious of such looks. Indeed, of late he had been quite lively and very much at home.

“Yes,” continued that good woman, “a young man alone in the world, without friends or relations, is greatly to be pitied. His situation is most forlorn. If sickness overtakes him, his chances of recovery depends entirely on what care it may suit strangers to take of him. If misfortune or poverty assail, he may be pressed down far below his natural level, and never have the opportunity to rise again. Even if fortune smiles it’s all the same. He has no one to delight in his success and share his joys.”

Poor Edward, he felt quite depressed at such a gloomy picture of his dangers.

“There is but one way, Edward, a young man so left can help himself and escape from the miseries that await him; marriage—a good marriage. Have you ever thought, my dear Edward, of the advantages of a perfect marriage—I mean with a father-in-law?”

Edward listened with attention to this speech of Mrs. Brown, but could not help smiling at the close.

“Indeed, Mrs. Brown, I’ve never been in a position to think of such a thing, but how with a father-in-law? I don’t quite understand.”

“That shows, my dear Edward—I call you Edward because I feel such an interest in your welfare—that you’ve never properly considered the subject. Suppose, for instance, you were to marry a girl without a penny, and you would have to divide your salary, which perhaps you think not too much for one, among your wife and eight small and sickly children.”

“Oh, Mrs. Brown, not so bad as that I hope.”

“Yes, yes, poverty always brings a pack of children, but say six now—a delicate wife and six puny young ones. The poor woman worn out with hard work and worry. Would there be any chance of happiness for you with that crowd?

“Now, I ask you seriously, as a sensible young man, to think of all the hardships, privations and despair of such a position.”

It brought tears into his eyes to contemplate this miserable future before him. What a crime it would be to bring poor Cousin Helen into such a life of poverty and distress.

“On the other hand,” continued Mrs. Brown, “suppose you marry with a father-in-law, or in other words with a healthy girl who has friends, able and willing to help her and you. See how quickly the situation is changed. Your father-in-law, finding your income too small for comfort or even luxury, immediately takes you into partnership, gives you a handsome interest in the business. Your income which before was both brief

and precarious and all too scant for one expands at once to be more than sufficient for two. If sick, a loving wife and devoted mother-in-law attend you. If lonely, your sweet girl is by your side. If lively, your appreciative wife shares your merry humor. So you pass happy through life. Your pains are alleviated, your joys doubled, misfortunes diminished, success increased. In short, instead of starting out in life at the bottom of the ladder and spending years in a vain struggle to ascend a few slippery rounds from the mire of abject poverty, you are placed by one stroke of luck in a secure position, and all your after life is spent in ease and comfort. Take warning in time, my dear young man, and profit by the experience of your elders."

"Mrs. Brown, your interest in me is most flattering, and I would be only too glad to find a safe shelter from the coming ills of life, but where, oh, where am I to find a—a—father-in-law?"

"Edward, my dear boy, I'm surprised at your obtuseness. I'll send Julia to you, I'm sure you want to see her."

Edward, thus fully enlightened, was content that on the whole it was the best thing he could do for himself, so he seated the dear Julia beside him and explained to her the whole situation, told her all her mother had proposed and agreed himself in the handsomest manner to the whole plan.

It was some time before Miss Julia could make out the meaning of all this talk. She listened at first in doubt—then shame—and then with an indignant flush

she turned her back on the satisfied and unobservant young gentleman and cut his tale short.

“The idea!” exclaimed the angry Julia. “To offer to bribe you to take me.”

And so it happened that our hero, although twice nearly married, remained still a bachelor.

IV.

LOOKING away back before the opening of steam navigation on the great lakes, before the North Pacific railroad was ever thought of, there was a prosperous little settlement around where is now the town of Oakland, Oregon.

A few families, well provided with everything necessary to make a success of their little colony, had emigrated to that beautiful country, bounded by the great Columbia River on the one side and spurs of the Rocky Mountains on the other. The rude log huts, which were first erected as shelter from the weather and protection against Indians, were followed in later years by comfortable homes, surrounded by fine, well cultivated and well stocked farms. At first they had neither lawyers nor money among them, but found they could be happy without either. Although they had no market for anything their lands or labors produced, their wealth largely increased from year to year, for their flocks and herds multiplied greatly.

The building of the North Pacific railroad through these lands and the laying out the county town of Oakland near by was quickly followed by an influx of new settlers, eager to reap the benefits of the rich soil and glorious climate. All this added greatly to the

wealth of the half-dozen families who had originally taken up these virgin lands.

Among the number, John Stoner, brother of the great Boston merchant—now lying buried and forgotten—had prospered greatly in all his worldly affairs. Only one great and irreparable loss had overtaken him. His young and delicate wife was not able to stand such a life of exposure and hard labor. She never recovered from the fatigue of the long journey to their new Western home. Her death was a great blow to John Stoner, and the twins left behind, only a few months old, increased his despair. The woman who had traveled with them took the infants in hand, assisted by all the women of the settlement, who took the kindest interest in these motherless children. They grew up strong, healthy and beautiful girls, the pride of the whole county, and were pointed out to all newcomers as a sample of what the new settlement could produce. As they advanced towards womanhood they became charming and attractive, both in person and manners; and especially noticeable from the fact that only those well acquainted with the family could tell them apart. They were tall, straight, with soft brown hair and dark blue eyes. In all, their appearance and features altogether the opposite of their Cousin Helen, of whose existence they had only recently heard.

It need not be said they ruled Papa Stoner and every one and everything within their reach. For education they received all the country could bestow, and for dress and personal adornments all the town had to sell.

In a word they were as bright, frank and free as the

air they breathed. Who could blame a father for loving and indulging such charming daughters; and who could blame the daughters for accepting all that was offered to them, from the adoration of the father, to the admiration of the village beaux.

As his prosperity increased, Farmer Stoner built a handsome stone house in front of the old log hut, which now served for servants' quarters. It was said the new house was built for pride, but we know it was for love of his daughters.

The farmer was tall and fine-looking. His pure white hair made him look older than he really was. He was in robust health, and a liberal leader in all good works, both in church and public affairs. He made the best prayer in meeting and the best stump speech. Was the best judge of stock and grain, and owned the best. His grain grew the tallest—his grass the heaviest—and his cattle the fattest. He was a good neighbor—a fast friend—and a poor enemy. He never quarreled with any one, for, as he said, he preferred his wrongs and peace to his rights and war. He was respected and quoted by the old—admired and loved by the young—and yet he was censured by all the old women of the region for his one great fault. He *would* indulge his daughters. No friendly warnings nor kindly advice, freely bestowed, could drive Farmer Stoner from his fatal weakness. But all the young people declined to believe in the dangerous effects of the farmer's method of bringing up his girls. Indeed, Papa Stoner was the friend of all the young men and adored by all the young girls. If a favor was to be asked, he was the man to

grant it, or if a refusal was thought necessary, as indeed was but seldom, it was done in such a kindly spirit, that such a refusal appeared a double favor. If the young people were resolved on having a high good time, papa Stoner's house was the place to meet, and his daughters the girls to lead the fun. The old folks insisted the daughters would be thoroughly spoiled and the young people declared they were just the dearest, sweetest, smartest and prettiest pair in the whole State of Oregon.

The old man once lectured his daughters. It was an event in the family, and made a sensation through the country. He called them to him on the porch and told them gravely he felt it was his duty to lecture them. They wanted to take their favorite places, one on each knee; but he made them take chairs in front of him so they could attend properly to his words.

He said he felt lately more than ever the loss of their dear mother, whom they had never seen. He felt it was a great responsibility to bring up motherless girls. His friends had advised him that he was allowing them too much freedom—and much ill would come of it. Now they knew very well what they were to him, and under such circumstances they would no doubt understand the necessity of the greatest caution. They should consider seriously the case, and if they thought they had too much freedom they had better take less in the future; but above all be very careful to do nothing in any way that would abridge their comforts or pleasures in life. For his part he felt that life was so short and there were so many worries and troubles, that it was the duty

of every one to get and give all the pleasure possible. Of course he meant only proper and honest things, for he had that perfect confidence in them as to know they would never act or think in any manner that was even doubtful. This hint he would venture—the possible danger of perfect health and the high spirits of youth leading them towards something that could be considered of doubtful propriety by their elders—here there was a long pause, and the sisters listened attentively for the end—but he would leave it to their own judgment to do always what they thought right.”

This lecture made a great impression on the girls, and they talked it over with old Charity and took her advice as to how they could show papa that his wishes were their pleasures.

Charity gave it as her opinion that they had always laughed too much.

“Well, you dear old mammy, how can we help it?” said the pretty Alice, who, as the eldest by an hour, took the lead. “Still,” said Lucy, “we must reform that.” Here the girls looked at each other with great gravity for a minute, but it was too much for them—they fell into each other’s arms and had a great laugh at the very thought of not laughing.

“But, indeed,” said Alice, “we must do something to relieve dear papa’s anxiety. What can we do, Charity?”

“Indeed, dears, I don’t know what to say. Fact is, all these neighbors are mad ’cause your pa have the only two swans in the country and they have only ugly ducks.”

“ Oh, Charity ! ”

“ Yes-em—fact.”

“ But, Charity, what are we going to do about it ? ”

“ Do what your Bible tells you—fast and pray. How would that suit you ? ”

“ You know well enough it wouldn’t suit us at all.”

“ No—well—I thought fasting was not your style. Now, for my part, I never feel real pious until I get the kitchen scrubbed up and take a good wash myself.”

“ Well, if you have no better advice to give us, you may go and smoke your pipe in your dirty kitchen.”

“ Very well, Miss Lucy—very well, but good pies are not baked in dirty kitchens.”

“ Oh, you dear pious old soul ; are you speaking now of potpies, chicken potpies ? ”

“ I am, with bottom crust.”

“ Then I take it all back—your kitchen’s brighter than silver and your pies better than fine gold—there now, can I say fairer than that ? ”

The old woman went off in high good humor.

What would the farmer and his daughters have done without old Charity. No mother could have shown more constant care and loving devotion to her own children, than this ignorant old woman had bestowed on these, her darlings. All the men about the farms were in fear of her, and she was a terror to the women, but to her children she was more than a mother.

“ Good night, Charity,” cried Lucy after her ; “ go to bed and snore in comfort ; for as dear papa says, there are but few pleasures in life and we should enjoy them all as we go along.”

"I don't think," said Alice, "he meant it exactly in that way."

"Well then, come to bed, you sweet lamb, and don't snore, for you shall enjoy yourself any way you like."

There was a long pause after the sisters were snug in bed—both thinking over the exciting evening—when—a voice, "Alice are you asleep?"

"No, love!"

"Who do you think it was put papa up to it?"

"Oh, the widow Pepper, of course. She was here an hour this afternoon."

* * * * *

"Alice, are you asleep?"

"No, dear, what do you want?"

"She's awful rich, ain't she?"

"They say a thousand acres of improved land and money out on mortgage."

"Well, I'm not afraid of money on mortgage, but a thousand acres of cleared land, and adjoining ours—it's a frightful temptation."

* * * * *

"Lucy!"

"Well, sweetie, say on."

"Do you take your father for a fool?"

"David said all men are fools."

"Indeed, he never said anything of the kind."

"Well, he said all men are liars, and I'm sure that's a great deal worse. I don't see why the widow should be so down on us now, she was always so friendly."

"Didn't I warn you, Lucy, not to let her see you teasing her dear Jakey! and now that's what we get for it."

* * * * *

"Well, Alice, if that thousand acres must come into the family, rather than have the widow for a step-mother, I'd accept Jakey for a brother-in-law."

"Indeed, Miss, you're too kind; you'd offer up your sister as a sacrifice to the family craving for land! But" (after a pause) "there's much truth in what you say. and if the worst comes to the worst, I don't mind drawing lots as to which shall have the dear boy. He's a good-hearted giant, Lucy, and you might do worse."

"Thank you—the longest straw names the martyr."

V.

THE Widow Pepper drove over betimes in the morning. She found it necessary to consult Farmer Stoner on all important matters of business. The farmer was so kind and poor woman, she had so much business to trouble her. She was a good-looking, hearty, jolly old body, and didn't hesitate to say that Mr. Stoner was the only sensible man in the county, and the only man she cared to speak to since the death of her poor John Jacob.

The widow had laid siege to Farmer Stoner a good many years, and it had long been the feeling of the public that the farmer should listen to reason and put an end to the general suspense; besides, it was plain enough to the widow, the farmer wasn't fit to manage his girls, who stood in great need of a mother's watchful care.

It was only of late the daughters had a faint suspicion of what had long been patent to the whole county; and only the previous night they had entered on the alliance mentioned.

John Jacob, her only son and darling, was the widow's coachman this morning, and drove her over (as indeed he did on every opportunity) in the buggy with the old gray mare.

The first thing the girls saw when they came down in

the morning was the widow in close consultation with their father, and Jakey, sitting off on a bench in the yard, grinning at them.

After bidding the widow good morning, they retired for consultation, pretending not to see Mr. John Jacob.

"Well, Alice, it's the first time before breakfast."

"Yes, and papa looks awfully interested."

"I think," said Lucy, "the worst has now come to the worst, and if anything is to be done it were well it were done quickly."

"Get the straws, Alice, and let's settle it before it's too late."

"Lucy dear, don't you think we might wait a little longer?"

"No, indeed, delays are dangerous, but really now, Alice, you're the oldest, and if you want to claim the first chance I won't stand in your way. He's large, certainly, and can't be called handsome or bright, but he's just as good and honest as he is heavy. So, Alice dear——" But this speech was cut short by the entrance of Mr. Pepper himself, stamping along in his big cowhide boots, with his pantaloons stuffed in the tops.

"What er you two gals snickerin' about in here? You needn't pretend you didn't see me. If you don't come out to talk to me, I'll just stop in here. Ma and the farmer don't want me out there—they have some deep talk between them."

"What are they talking about?" inquired Lucy.

"Oh, ma's got that-a-way she can't do any business 'thout consultin' Mr. Stoner," and he gave such a queer

look at them they could not help bursting out into a great laugh.

“What does the monster mean?” cried Lucy.

“Oh, you let me alone, you two. I’m not such a fool as I look.”

“Well, I’m glad to know it,” replied Lucy.

“There’s goin’ to be a weddin’ in our family soon,” said Jacob, “and I think Mrs. Pepper is mistaken as to the one that’s in it. Yes, indeed, I’d marry either of you two for the askin’. What do you say to that now?”

“Oh, that’s too kind indeed, Jakey. Which one will you take?” inquired Lucy.

“Oh, my dear Alice—Lucy—you make me the happiest man alive,” burst out Mr. Pepper, “but I’m not particular, either of you is twice too good for me—fact is never can tell you apart. Just settle it between yourselves and name the day.”

“Don’t you think it would be rather inconvenient to not be able to tell your wife from your sister-in-law?”

“I love you both so dearly, it’s all the same to me; but when you decide I’ll hang a collar of diamonds and pearls around my wife’s neck to mark her by.”

“That’s a very pretty speech, Jakey, and when we decide to marry you, we’ll draw lots and send you word.”

“And that’s a very pretty speech, wife or sister—this afternoon?—or, I can wait till morning.”

“No, no! Jakey, you know we’re only in fun. Of course we love you like sisters, and always did.”

“Well, I’ll stand no fun of that kind. One of you shall love me as a sister, and one as a wife. So now one of you——”

"No, no!" cried Alice. "You mustn't talk that way, Jakey, indeed you must not; we've no thought of marrying any one; we're too young to marry."

"All the same, I'll wait and when one of you two as is engaged to me is ready, just send me word. I'll be waiting."

"Now don't, please, dear Jakey," said Alice. "You know we never promised, and we'll be awfully offended if you mention it to any one."

"I won't do anything to offend you. I couldn't do it. I love you both too much; but I'll just wait and wait, and when you're ready just send round for Mr. John Jacob Pepper, and you'll find him ready, in store clothes—boiled shirt—and brand new boots, and if everything on earth that a faithful loving man can do to make his wife and sister happy can make you two happy——"

"Oh, Jakey, please——"

But Mr. Pepper marched off the victor to the consternation of the young ladies, and as he drove the buggy off he pulled up the old mare and called back: "Either's too good for me. Just settle it between yourselves and send round when you're ready."

"What does he say?" inquired the farmer.

"It's only some of his nonsense," said Lucy, and the girls rushed off to escape farther questioning.

Jakey boldly announced his engagement to one of the Stoner girls, but admitted it wasn't settled as yet which one. The girls passed it off as a joke, as the only way to meet troublesome inquiries.

Jakey declared there was only two things in the world

he cared for, money and the Stoner girls. And indeed he was very fond of money, a trick he had inherited from both parents. Any penny that came into his hands stayed there. It was a pity his father, the old miser Pepper as he had been called, had not lived to see what a worthy son continued his business, adding dollar to dollar, while his thrifty widow added acre to acre.

The excitement of the town now increased. The great question was as to which pair would get in first. Bets were freely offered, with large odds, that the widow would come in ahead, marry the farmer and put an end to Jacob's designs.

The wits tried joking with Jakey as to which of the girls he was to marry, but he was too large and looked too dangerous to make the fun very tempting.

Having some ready cash for investment, John Jacob consulted the native jewelers as to the comparative advantages of investments in bonds or diamonds. The result was he showed Miss Alice a string of precious stones that would have brought tears into a Jewess' eyes. Mr. Pepper said nothing, but he looked a great deal, and yet, notwithstanding the daily pleasant intercourse and the constant hints that he was tired waiting, he was well aware no progress was being made towards the end desired, and he cast about anxiously for some means to bring himself into more favor with the young ladies. They treated him with delightful familiarity, and they had much fun together, but still no progress.

There came a dapper little doctor to the town, whose dress and whole appearance Jakey noticed and admired.

If he could get himself up in that style, no girl would be able to resist his addresses.

He determined at last to make friends with the doctor and if possible find out his secret, and as the young farmer had long been accustomed to having all his wishes promptly granted (excepting, indeed, by the Misses Stoner) the cowhide boots were found waiting their turn the next day in the doctor's office.

Being invited into the inner sanctum the polite little doctor would know what illness oppressed this giant. The very idea of such a question made Jakey roar. He had no more notion of what a pain or sickness was, than how he could reduce his cowhide boots to the elegant appearance of the pretty little foot of the new doctor.

When Mr. Pepper laughed the little doctor smiled in concert. He was a polite little man and most anxious to increase his connection.

"What is your fee?" inquired Jakey, bluntly.

"Well," replied the doctor, disconcerted, "that depends—it runs all the way from nothing to ten dollars—according to the extent of the case—and—well, the means of the patient has some effect on the size of the bill."

"Exactly, and as my case must be considered a large one—in fact, I don't think there's a larger man in the town, I'll hand over a tenner."

The newcomer had never seen or heard of Jakey, and was sufficiently surprised and delighted at such a queer patient. However, if the big man had money to spend he could not put it to a more useful purpose, and

the doctor prepared to give him the full worth of his cash in the best medical advice his books and experience would afford. Bowing politely—"Excuse me, I failed to catch your name."

"John Jacob Pepper, farmer."

"Oh! ah! Well, Mr. Pepper, will you just please go on and state just what is the matter with you and——"

"Oh!" interrupted Mr. Pepper, "I don't care half a calf for all the drugs in town—never was sick in my life and never intend to be—not such a fool—but that's no reason I shouldn't do my share towards supporting the doctor. The Chinese, I've heard, always pay the doctor when they're well. By the big plow and little harrow, I think it's a very sensible plan, and I hope, doctor, you will agree with me."

"I think, sir, it's most sensible, especially as you declare you never intend to get sick. It will suit me exactly."

"Well, doctor, I'll bid you good-day and perhaps will call again to see you to-morrow," and Mr. Pepper marched out with a tramp that shook the floor of the office. All the time of the interview Mr. Pepper gazed at the doctor's clothes from top to bottom, but it was hopeless. He couldn't take it in, and somehow was not ready to explain his wants.

The doctor lost no time in making inquiries about his eccentric patient, but could find no one who had ever heard of a Mr. Pepper in that region, for Jakey he had lived all the days of his life. The next day Mr. Pepper appeared at the same hour, and having promptly handed over ten dollars, proceeded at once to business.

"I suppose it's your place to give advice—makes no difference to you what kind of advice, so you're paid for it?"

"Well, really, I don't quite follow you. Of course I'm bound to give the best advice in my power."

"Certainly, doctor, just my idea. Well, as I mentioned to you yesterday, I'm ready to do my share towards supporting all the business in the town, but as for medical advice it wouldn't be of the least use. If you'd tell me now exactly what to do—if I ever had the smallpox, for instance, I'd be sure to forget it before wanted—same time, doctor, I don't want you to take me for such a fool as to pay out cash for nothing."

"Of course not, my dear sir; of course not," said the doctor, bowing, but lost in clouds of doubt as to what the young lunatic was driving at. Indeed, the doctor could not help feeling a little nervous as he surveyed the huge proportions of his curious patient, especially as he noticed that all the time Mr. Pepper examined every part of his dress with the closest attention, even counting the buttons on his vest.

"Now, as to hair," broke out Mr. Pepper suddenly, and gazing at the doctor's head so intently the little man could not help wincing, "how do you manage it?"

The doctor was speechless. He looked for nothing else but to see the giant pull out a knife and take off his scalp without further ceremony. Finding his patient made no hostile move, he gained courage and turned over in his mind quickly how he should answer the madman to give the least offense.

"Your hair," continued Mr. Pepper, "looks so

smooth and oily, and mine is so stiff and shocking. How could I get my hair into the same ornamental condition?"

"Please explain yourself," gasped the doctor.

"Doctor, I will, in the strictest confidence and on honor—do you take me?"

"Go on, I'm as silent as the—as the——"

"I'd have you to know, doctor, I'm engaged to two young and charming girls, and as soon as they decide which one is to have me, we're to be married. Now, the truth is, to be plain with you that, while for good looks, good wit, and a fat purse, I'm the equal of any man in the county, yet I make no progress—they only laugh and make fun of me, and won't decide. Now I can't marry both of them—can I?"

"Certainly not, in this state."

"Well, and so they put me off. There's something the matter with me, doctor. I feel it."

"My dear sir, if you'd only explain where you feel it, I would have some chance."

"Oh, d—n your drugs, there's nothing the matter with my insides, it's outside I——"

"Any irruption or irritation?"

"Doctor, do you want me to brain you? It's the clothes that's the matter. I see it all now. Lend me your clothes and I'm all right and my happiness would soon be complete." In his excitement Mr. Pepper got up and walked round the office, but never taking his eyes off the model clothes.

"But, my dear sir," replied the doctor, prudently retreating to the remotest corner. "You couldn't wear

my clothes. You couldn't get into them. Please sit down and calm yourself and I'll do all in my power to please you."

"Very well—go on—how shall I make my hair look like yours? It's about the same color and a great deal longer, but it don't look so well somehow."

It was plain to the doctor his only safety was to keep the talk going until some relief arrived. He might be only a harmless simpleton after all.

"Mr. Pepper, you must understand it's no easy matter to keep the hair in fine condition, but it must be plain to you the shorter, the less trouble to keep it in order—further, by wearing the hair short it is less likely to collect dirt, and—a—hayseed," the doctor ventured. "Therefore, my advice is to go to the barber's."

"I'm obliged to you, doctor. The idea never occurred to me before. Cut it short, in brief, is the long and short of the whole matter," and Mr. Pepper tramped off without further words to try the effect of the doctor's advice.

The result was a very presentable head walking around on the most surprising body with the heaviest boots.

The contrast was funny, but not a man in the town dared smile at Jakey. The transformation, however, enabled the doctor to find out who and what his remarkable patient was, and indeed he would welcome a visit every day and give any kind and amount of advice, if paid for so handsomely, for neither patients nor dollars were too plenty with the young man.

The doctor was gratified next day with another visit and a prompt fee.

"Now, as to boots," said Mr. Pepper, coming at once to business, and sticking out his great foot.

"There, Mr. Pepper, you come to really the most important point. The head is important—the dress more so—but the feet most of all."

"I'm glad you like these boots—large—comfortable, and keep out the water when well greased—number ten and a half."

"The boots are splendid," replied the doctor, suppressing a smile, "for working round a barn, or tramping through a marsh, but not the best style, in my opinion, to make a call on two charming young ladies; besides, it is not customary in the best society to call on ladies with the trousers stuffed into the tops of the boots. Now if you will take my advice, go to Mr. Cobbleswick and have him make you a pair of shoes—like these"—sticking out his little foot—"you'll find them lighter and handsomer."

"They may be lighter, but I'll be danged if they're handsomer," said Jakey, who was a little offended at the slight put on his new boots, which he admired greatly. Mr. Pepper marched off in a huff, and the doctor supposed it was the last of him, but he appeared again the next day, and the process was continued until Jakey was developed into Mr. John Jacob Pepper, an astonishment to the neighborhood and a thing of beauty to himself. The widow's stock now fell, and heavy odds were offered in favor of Mr. Pepper.

"Don't let money stand in the way of winning such a prize," advised the doctor. "It's worth to you all it can cost and more, and now you've polished yourself up

and look like a gentleman, as you are, buy yourself a proper turnout; a handsome buggy and stylish pair of horses. Show the young ladies you're something more than a clod-hopper or cowboy." The little doctor never rested until Mr. Pepper was set up in good shape.

"Now go. Let the ladies see you're a man. Ask one of them to take a drive and let that decide it. Which-ever one goes with you make that one your wife."

Mr. Pepper followed the doctor's advice. The surprise and admiration of the girls at sight of Mr. John Jacob and his turnout was unbounded. Never was such a grub metamorphosed into such a brilliant butterfly, and his manners and speech had both been so improved by the doctor's hints and example the girls could hardly believe it was the same man. Mr. Pepper had received a good education and every opportunity to make a man, and only needed to have the rough exterior polished up. Which of us would not be soiled and carry some of the dirt after eight or ten years contact with farm laborers.

It happened the fair Alice took the first ride, little dreaming of the decision that was to be made by it. Mr. Pepper, having been well coached by the doctor, played his cards so well during the drive that he landed Miss Alice at home more than half consenting. Ever after that memorable ride Mr. Pepper was able to tell the girls apart and knew the one he claimed and loved as his own.

* * * * *

Helen had now fairly started towards this bounteous

land, where peace and plenty smiled. She little realized the reception of overflowing love awaiting her in the delightful home of her uncle. It is a way these Western people have. Whatever they do of love or business, they do it with the whole heart. In reply to her letter asking if she might go, Helen received a quick reply by telegraph that puzzled her greatly. "Come at once," it read, "will divide the last crust with you." Could it be the family were so poor, or was it only the highest expression of kinship? She had not the least idea of how many or who composed the family, but resolved to risk it. Did not the great West contain somewhere her dear cousin? Perhaps he too might find his way to Uncle John's.

Alice and Lucy waited with impatience the arrival of Helen, and perhaps also Edward, whom Helen mentioned she hoped to meet in Oakland. What joy, what delight, to have real cousins of their own. It came like a revelation; they never knew or thought of having any relation excepting only their father, so completely had all family ties been severed by time and distance.

VI.

It was a warm evening—a gentle breeze fluttered the leaves on trees and vines—the cattle and sheep had stretched themselves out for a night's rest—all was repose—only the tuneful frogs began their evening song.

Farmer Stoner sat in slippers and shirt sleeves on the piazza, enjoying the county newspaper. That and his Bible were his favorite reading. The young ladies in the parlor were singing a soft and pleasing melody. The servants, men and maids, were resting after the day's labors on various scattered seats among the trees—Charity—her kitchen brightened to the highest point—was piously smoking her pipe. The waters in the stream near by flowed softly along with scarce a ripple.

What can be more peaceful than twilight on a great farm?

The farmer's head fell forward, the paper dropped from his lap.

* * * * *

Suddenly a change came over this whole scene of quiet rest. The little dogs began to bark, the great mastiffs joined in the chorus—the cattle got on their feet to see what was the matter—the sheep ran round as if disturbed by uneasy dreams.

What had caused all this disturbance? Only the appearance of one young man—a bright, handsome young fellow. We have made his acquaintance before.

The farmer stood up in doubt—the girls, startled and hesitating for a moment, rushed forward in certainty—it must be—it was the expected cousin. Overcome with joy, nor waiting to decide the proprieties of the occasion, they gave the astonished stranger a right-royal cousinly, sisterly welcome.

The old man came forward and shook him warmly by the hand. “Edward, the son of my brother Amos! Happy day for me, when I see once more some of my own blood. Girls, what are you doing? Can’t you welcome your cousin. Nephew, what do you say to your cousins? Can all the East produce their like?”

“No, not all the world,” replied the amazed young man.

At which pretty compliment we may suppose some further welcome ceremonies took place. Pray excuse this avalanche of a welcome; they were wild with joy at having a cousin, and especially such a brave, handsome young man. A finished and perfect cousin all handed over at one happy stroke for their delight.

We love to read how in the ancient times the father fell on the young man’s neck and welcomed him, but can any father be thought of while two such cousins are making welcome; and can any dish of veal compare with that wonderful cooking of old Charity, which was to follow. The old woman declared she recognized him at a glance, he favored so greatly his father, whom she knew well in the days long gone by.

The arrival of Cousin Edward was a great event, and the excitement over the whole place immense.

"Now, God forgive me," said that young man, when at last he was suffered to go to his rest in the best spare-room, "for deceiving such a grand old man and two such glorious girls!" for our friend Edward was at that moment trading for pelts at Eagle Harbor, while he was being personated here by his quondam friend, John Smith.

"I had no intention of such a thing, I had no idea of such a thing," repeated Smith over and over to himself. "I was only going to pay them a little visit and give them the news of Cousin Edward; but those girls, they gave me no time for explanation—they swept my wits from under me—they stole my heart away. And now what a pretty scrape I'm in. If I sneak off on the sly they'll rouse the country to find their lost cousin. If I attempt to explain and apologize, what censure, frowns and tears, with a good chance of a horsewhipping to end the game. Fool! fool! that I was. Why didn't I cry out in haste: Hold! hands off! I am no cousin of yours! But I couldn't do it. I hadn't time for anything. It is plain nothing can be done rashly. Enough mischief has come from haste. I will take a day or two to consider what is the safest and most kindly way to untangle this mesh."

Oh, unwise, oh, fatal delay! What net of love can be untangled by daily tightening the knots!

Mr. Pepper drove over as usual the next morning, but his fine turnout could receive no attention that day.

It was apparent to this gentleman that he did not approve of male cousins at all, and how a strange man could turn up suddenly, and, just because a cousin, create all this sensation, was more than he could make out.

However, it was plain something would have to be done about it without delay, and to prevent mistakes he thought it advisable to favor Cousin Edward with some good advice. At the first opportunity he informed Edward, without circumlocution, that if he intended to go in he must confine his attentions to Cousin Lucy.

"You'll find it much more satisfactory," remarked Mr. Pepper. "I used to go in for the pair myself, but made no progress, and had no comfort in that way. Try it," continued Mr. Pepper, "stick to one and prosper. It's the only plan for success."

Here the young ladies could stand it no longer. "Come, Mr. John Jacob, you've no right to keep our cousin away—and what secrets are you telling him there?"

"Why, I was only inviting him to try a spin behind my bays. If Alice won't go with me I'm bound to have company."

There was a great outcry at this, and Mr. Pepper was ordered off, but he understood very well what he wanted and succeeded in carrying Miss Alice off for her morning's ride.

Mr. John Smith found Mr. Pepper's advice very good and the society of one very satisfactory, on that and many succeeding days. Every night he firmly resolved the next day should be the last and he must surely break

away, but the next day for that good action never came. To explain now and own his fraud would certainly be to lose at once what he now found was more to him than all he had ever imagined. It was impossible, and beyond his strength. And yet any day Helen or the real Edward might arrive, and in an instant his love, and all chance of happiness would dissolve and melt away.

There was but one course open to him, but one chance to secure this great prize. If he could persuade Lucy to elope and marry him, she would be his, and beyond that he must trust to fortune and the future. Surely a life of devoted love would make amends for a hasty marriage.

He was handsome and fascinating to Lucy, who had never met such a man before, and he had all the advantages of cousinship. A daily, an hourly pressure, and many specious reasons at last had their effect. Poor Lucy prayed and begged him to ask her father's consent, which she promised without doubt. She trembled at the thought of any rash action or indeed of any course without the counsel of her sister, without whose advice she had hardly ever bought even a yard of ribbon.

The situation, difficult enough before, became desperate by the receipt of a letter from Helen announcing her speedy arrival. Smith, wild with love and fear, redoubled his efforts.

Alas! alas! they were only too successful. The result quickly followed in the disappearance of the pair.

* * * * *

What anger and distress trembled in the farmer's

speech, what fear and grief filled the heart of the deserted sister. As for Mr. Pepper, his great frame was all too small to hold his righteous indignation. What scandal for a county, and, must we confess, what satisfaction to the neighboring gossips—it was just what they expected—I always told you so—girls suffered to grow up without control must come to bad ends. They understood nothing of that control of a goodly example and a kindly word.

But the die was cast, the deed was done. Love stepped in and urged the speedy forgiveness, the hasty recovery of the lost one.

A newspaper from Portland, received a few days later, contained a notice of the marriage and served to show the direction of their flight, and probable present location. This paper was a great satisfaction to Mr. Pepper, but as for father and sister they never thought of any greater evil than this unkind and thoughtless desertion, and the errors of a hasty marriage.

“Well,” remarked Mr. John Jacob, on hearing repeated the farmer’s lament that his consent had not been asked and everything done decently and in good order, “since there’s no objection to the match, there can be no discredit from the haste, so let us thank our stars it’s no worse; and wait quietly, with all the patience we can, and we’ll soon hear from them and have them back again.”

Although they all talked it over under every imaginable supposition, they had not the least hint of the real reason for the elopement.

In the midst of this excitement Helen arrived, but all

the kind attention and anxious civilities of the family could not hide their great distress.

The farmer mourned for his absent daughter and Alice could not live happily without her dear sister, from whom she had never before been separated, even for a night. Helen was shocked and grieved beyond measure when she heard of the conduct of Edward. To reward in this base manner all the affectionate kindness of his new relations—it was so unlike him; and she could hardly believe he could be so false to her. When she heard all the details, and especially how the elopement followed quickly after the receipt of the last letter telling of her early arrival, the whole thing was made plain to her. Edward, too cowardly to meet her, too selfish to give up Lucy, had saved himself by flight.

She was greatly disturbed to find her uncle and cousin in such heavy trouble. The burden of the farmer's distress was the constant foreboding that behind it all there was some unexplained and awful mystery that would suddenly come to light to the dismay of the family. He could not be comforted while he could see no reason for such unnecessary flight.

Helen perceived that if her uncle could be satisfied on this point and the dread of some impending danger removed his mind would be more at ease. She was the only one who possessed the fatal clue, and her feelings must not stand in the way. It was a severe trial to tell publicly of her desertion, but she could not bear to witness such heavy grief, if any words of hers would ease the minds of her new-found relations.

One evening as they sat on the piazza, Mr. Pepper

as usual one of the party—the suppressed sighs of the farmer were all that broke the quiet of the hour. Helen could stand it no longer.

“Uncle, let me tell you a little story—a sad story, but with a happy ending and with a moral too.”

Favored by the increasing darkness, Helen began her confession. “Once, far away from here—there lived two cousins—a boy and a girl. Their parents for some reasons of money were greatly estranged and forbid any intercourse between these two. Chance more kindly than their own blood brought them together when children, and they became—all unknown to their parents—dear and affectionate companions. As they grew older, these ties of kinship ripened into—into—— Suddenly they were separated under many painful circumstances of poverty and death. The young man, thinking his cousin could better survive the wreck alone, resolved that no weight of his misfortunes should be added to her burdens.

“You see, they were not engaged. They lived enjoying the present, and caring, thinking nothing of the future; and now they were so poor, forlorn and buried under such heavy waves of trouble that only timely rescue could be considered; but there remained, perhaps, the thought that if in the distant future prosperity should ever smile again on them, these faint hopes and wistful longings might change to—to——

“But they were not engaged, you must understand that clearly. She was bound to him by a love stronger than death, but he—he—was free.”

Here poor Helen's voice trembled and tears, all unseen, fell quietly from her eyes.

"If time and absence should change his feelings—if another dearer girl should win his love—he was free."

"He drifted West, at his uncle's house met another cousin—a lovely girl. No man's heart could withstand that tender voice—that sweet face was more than mortal could see untouched. How could a poor and homeless youth resist such charms, or how remember his absent cousin in such company. And—yet—perhaps—he had loved his cousin—well——"

"Go on, dear," said her uncle. "I think I see the end."

"The end is near. What could happen under such circumstances? This dear innocent fell in love with her handsome cousin, and he with her. When he heard of the expected arrival of that other cousin, what could he do! Could he break the heart and destroy the life of this dear angel by his side! You know the end.

"It was in every way a suitable match and we may hope and pray they will live a long and happy life. And her father forgave them both."

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There was a long pause—and then the old man said:

"I thank you, dear Helen, your story is a great relief to me and you are a noble girl to tell it for my comfort. Yet I cannot think the young man did right."

"He was simply a beast," cried Alice, "to change and desert his first love so."

“He couldn’t help himself,” said a great voice from the darkness. “Why, dang it all, some girls are so bewitching no man is able to stand against them. They have no right to be so enchanting if they expect a man to keep his reason about him.”

This speech was answered by a little laugh, and they all retired with softer hearts, and some with quieter minds.

Helen banished her uncle’s fears, but she could not ease the deep despair of her own heart at this cruel desertion by Edward. What a change one short year had wrought in the man that he could so soon forget her.

How blind we mortals are. Here is comfort from false consolation—grief and despair without cause; and not one of them feel the shadow of the great calamity impending.

What will happen when that fond father hears his precious child has been stolen away by an unknown man? Who will have courage to make known to him this awful news, or hint to that loving sister such a story?

VII.

MEANTIME, Edward, frightened at the talk of Mrs. Brown and disgusted at his refusal by Julia, resolved to leave the place at once and make his way to Oakland. It was a long and tedious route, and many thoughts of Helen filled his mind on the way.

Arrived at last at Oakland, he hurried at once to his uncle's farm, which he learned was near the town. As he came in front of the house he was amazed beyond measure to see Helen sitting alone on the piazza.

He rushed forward with extended hands and beating heart to greet her, but was received with the utmost coldness. Helen at first was surprised and startled, but immediately recovered her self-possession. She felt most indignant at Edward for his conduct towards herself and her cousin, and showed it plainly.

Edward, shocked at such a reception, demanded an explanation.

"Explanation!" cried Helen. "I think you, sir, are the one to explain, if you can. I don't complain of your deserting me; nothing better could be expected from a selfish man! but why marry in such haste and deceive the poor girl's family in that way. There was no occasion for such hasty proceedings. Her father was perfectly willing, and I'm sure I'd never stand in your way. I want no unwilling lover, I assure you."

Edward, confounded, stood speechless. This was some of Mrs. Brown's spite-work. Angry at his leaving her daughter she thirsted for revenge.

"Helen, my dear cousin, you are under some great mistake. Let me explain."

"No, sir, I need no explanation from you. The whole matter is only too plain. Infatuated with this new love you forgot your cousin far away; but never fear, I make no complaint, only at the rude and thoughtless manner of your elopement. It is a great wrong to a girl to induce her to leave home in that manner. It sets people talking and is a scandal to all her friends and relations.

"But there! it don't concern me any more what you do. From this day you are no cousin of mine. But where is your wife?"

"Good God, Helen! what are you talking about? I am not married—never had any idea of marrying the girl——"

Helen started to her feet—the blood rushed to her face—her eyes stood out with a look of horror.

As soon as she could recover herself she cried out: "Now Heaven save me from fainting and give me speech to express the scorn and loathing I feel for this inhuman monster. Fly, escape, before your uncle hears this story;" and she rushed away.

Edward stood aghast. He gazed vacantly around the place, unable to collect his thoughts or understand the meaning of this outbreak. For the present he could only retire. It would be easy to refute these slanders of an elopement and marriage.

Confounded, lost in thought, he walked back towards

the town, not even noticing, as she passed, Miss Alice, neat and tidy, on her return from the post-office, where she waited daily for the earliest chance of a letter from Lucy. But she noticed him from the first moment he came in sight. Strangers were too scarce in those parts to pass unheeded; and when she gave him that little friendly nod of greeting which it is the custom in the country to bestow even on strangers, she was surprised he made no return of her bow. Looking back she saw him seated on the trunk of an old tree, his face buried in his hands. She noticed he was a gentleman. Evidently he must be sick or in great distress.

It is not the custom in the far West to pass trouble by on the other side. This good Samaritan returned immediately to offer assistance.

“Do you feel sick?” she inquired kindly, standing before him; but there was no reply. “Come, tell me if you are sick, or in trouble. We live near by. It is my father’s pleasure to advise and aid all who are in distress. We have our own trouble, too, and know what it is to suffer. If you will come with me I’ll find my father. You are a stranger here and papa will tell you what to do.”

But Edward hardly moved. He was trying to think. His reception by Helen, coming after his long and exhausting journey, had quite overcome him. He felt faint and sick. All the time, among his troubled thoughts, sounded a sweet voice full of sympathy. Who was this good angel insisting on caring for the stranger?

He looked up and saw it was a young girl.

“Come,” she repeated, looking at him with compas-

sion. "You see I can't leave you here. Come and talk with father. He is Farmer Stoner and I am his daughter Alice." She smiled at him so sweetly he was obliged to return the smile.

Then this beautiful girl was his cousin and he had come upon the family in some time of trouble. It was the wrong season for his visit.

"How could I go to your father if he also is in trouble? I am indeed a stranger here and have heard nothing of it. Tell me what your trouble is. If not too great I would like to go to your father for help."

"Could money help you?" she asked timidly, offering her purse.

"No," he said, "not money; kind words will do me more good. I want to see your father, but must first know from what trouble he may be suffering."

Thus urged she told briefly how her Cousin Edward from the far East had paid them a visit, and what a great favorite he had proved among all the family, and how her dear sister Lucy, attracted by his handsome person and frank manners, had given him her love—all this was natural and right—but they had suddenly eloped a few days ago, to the great grief of her father and the scandal of the neighborhood. They heard next day of their marriage and since that, nothing.

Then her Cousin Helen had arrived also from the East, and they learned how basely Edward had deserted her to whom he was bound as his first love. Such conduct promised but ill for her sister's future happiness.

"This story amazed Edward. It was only too plain who was the guilty wretch who had worked all this mis-

chief. It was his former companion, John Smith, and all the information he had given him of family affairs had put it in his power to act this false part. He had worked quickly, fearing any moment the arrival of himself or Helen.

There was a long pause, Alice forgetting the man by her side, in painful thoughts of poor Lucy; and Edward endeavoring to collect his dazed senses to decide what should be done. The situation was most embarrassing, and yet no time should be lost in making known the truth. Would it kill the father to hear such a story? Could this frail woman bear such news?

At length he spoke. "Your story disturbs me greatly and perhaps at this time I should not go to your father. If I could meet a woman strong enough in body and mind to hear my story it might ease my mind and solve my doubts to share it with another."

Saying this, Edward looked up into her face doubtfully. The story must come out and that right soon. Delay might cause greater evils. But what would be the effect if he would inform this young girl suddenly that her sister had eloped with an unknown man, of doubtful reputation?

"Do you think your father could hear me?"

"No, if it is a painful story, spare him. He has suffered too much already. Go on, tell me."

"My story bears some resemblance to yours," said Edward. "I had a dear cousin too, but never deserted her—I came from Boston to the farthest West to seek my uncle. When I arrived at my uncle's house I saw there my cousin whom I supposed was still in Boston.

She received me with scorn and contempt, charged me with deserting her and eloping with another girl. She would listen to no explanation from me, nor make any herself. I have just left her under some frightful error. It afflicts me greatly to leave my cousin under this false impression, but more, that there may be behind it all some evil yet undreamt of—past remedy.

“On my way West I fell in with a noble, handsome young man. I told him, in confidence, all my family history and explained all my future plans, especially how I proposed to make my way West by degrees, find out my uncle, and if he would receive me kindly, stay a while with him.”

As he finished his story Alice sank unconscious by his side.

He hadn't the least idea what should be done. While he was gazing at her in helpless fright she recovered consciousness, and by his aid was able to stand up. She accepted his proffered arm and they walked slowly towards the house. Dismayed, terrified by his story she hoped there might be some deception here that would save poor Lucy from this awful wrong.

“What proof have you of the truth of your story?” she asked faintly.

“None! none! I wish the truth of it could be suppressed, buried mountains deep, but alas! it will out. It may not be so bad after all. We know nothing against him. He may make her an excellent husband and they may have a long and happy life before them.”

“Did you tell Helen of this?”

"She was too angry to listen to me, and indeed I could not understand her."

"You must stay until this matter is sifted to the bottom."

"I am at your service. What do you propose to do?"

"At present I can see nothing farther than this: that poor papa must not hear this story now. It may take on some better shape before he must know of it. Oh, what shall I do? I cannot hold this awful secret alone."

"You must do what you think best; but if you tell Helen you will have proof at once of the correctness of my story, know that I am really your cousin, and the other false; and Helen is wise and able to give you good advice. This much is certain, your sister should be traced at once and knowledge gained as to whether she needs assistance; or let us hope is well and happy, and all our fears groundless. Have you no brother, cousin or male friend who could help you in this extremity?"

"You—if you are my cousin—are the only one—excuse me please, I am so agitated—I have a friend (and Alice could not refrain a blush at putting things in such a shape), but he is far too violent to hear such a tale as this. He is so devoted to us and loves my sister so dearly that if he but guessed she had been wronged in any manner—the whole State would echo with his cry for vengeance."

"Well, we are near the house. I must leave you now. Helen is strong, self-reliant and fertile in resources. She will be of great assistance, and it will ease your mind to talk it over with her."

“It will ease Helen’s mind to know she has no false cousin. It is but justice to you, cousin—if you are my cousin—that she should be informed of this at once. Come again to-morrow morning—early—and now, good-by, sir. No man ever brought heavier news to a distressed family. It’s adding mountains to mountains of grief.”

After a few hasty steps, she hesitated, stopped, called him back.

“Mr.—sir—cousin”—she held out her hand to him, a kindly smile showing through her pitiful face—“it’s but a lame welcome to give a most welcome relation. My father shall make amends for this—when he comes to know you—for the present you will excuse a poor crushed—cousin.”

Edward mused and wondered as he walked away. What a vision! Could such grace and beauty belong to vulgar earth? Was it this sweet mountain air that thrilled in her tender voice? Her pure soul shone through her kindly eyes. The smile through her tears would melt a heart of stone. What would she be when in a happy mood? What mortal man could stand against such charms? No wonder! No wonder!

VII.

"FATHER, let me introduce a friend of Cousin Helen's who comes to make us a little visit. Mr.—ah——"

"Smith—John Smith," said Edward promptly.

"Mr. Smith," said the farmer, shaking hands cordially, "you're most welcome. Young ladies, see you make him comfortable," and Mr. Stoner passed on to his business.

Old Charity was very much taken with the appearance of Edward. As an ancient servant she was a privileged character.

"When I was a gell," remarked Charity, "I lived with Grandfather Stoner. I mind young Amos well. This young gentleman favors him."

"Oh, here is Mr. Pepper," cried Alice. "Mr. Pepper, let me present Mr. John Smith, friend of Cousin Helen."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Smith, or any friend of Miss Helen."

"As I was a sayin'," put in Charity, "Amos was a likely boy. You didn't happen to know him, did you, sir?"

"I don't believe I was in the country fifty years ago," replied Edward.

"Oh, Charity," said Alice. "I think you're wanted in the kitchen."

"Yes, miss, I'm wanted all round; but surely, surely this young man is a son of his father."

"We can't dispute that," said Mr. Pepper laughing.

"Yes, Mr. Pepper, I know'd your father very well too. He was a good man——"

"I'm glad to hear——"

"——to himself. The poor never needed aid when he was around——"

Mr. Pepper acknowledged the compliment with a polite bow.

"——if any one else helped them—but don't try to keep secrets from old Charity, which I wasn't born yesterday," she went off mumbling.

"She's a live tartar," said Mr. Pepper. "The only woman in the country my mother is afraid of."

Helen and Edward regarded each other with no friendly eyes.

"You gave me a great shock yesterday," said Helen.

"Well," replied Edward, "do you suppose I was delighted with your reception?"

"Well, sir, I can only say I'm sorry. I deeply regret my angry words and humbly ask your forgiveness. Can I do more to mollify your worship?"

"Come now," said Alice, "are relations so plenty that we must needs quarrel the first day of our meeting?"

"It's all his own fault," persisted Helen. "He could easily have said in one word—I never saw the girl."

"You attacked me so vigorously I had no chance to

get in a word; besides, I thought you were talking about another girl."

"Oh! ah! I thought you must have felt guilty, or you could have made yourself understood."

Helen had heard Alice's glowing account of Cousin Edward, and could not fail to notice how his eyes followed this new cousin about.

"Upon my word," cried Alice, "I'm ashamed of you—a pretty pair of lovers."

"I don't think there's much love lost between us," said Helen.

"Have it just as you please," said Edward. "You do me the greatest injustice and then want to quarrel with me."

All this time Mr. Pepper sat in dumb amazement. Who was this newcomer and what did all these hot words mean?

"Enough," cried Alice. "We must to business. The first thing is, shall we consult Mr. John Jacob Pepper, Thank heaven here's a man who is never out of humor."

"Miss Alice, I thank you."

"Whom nothing ruffles."

Mr. Pepper bows and smiles, delighted.

"Who would forgive any man who wronged him. He has learnt self-control and has a perfect command of his temper."

"Yes, that's so," said the pleased gentleman. "I take everything easy; nothing puts me out."

"A man," continued Alice, "who is always mild and quiet, no matter what turns up."

"Yes, that's me," said Mr. Pepper, glowing under

such a flood of praise—"but what is the meaning of it all?"

"It means, sir, we want the man I have described to help us in a serious emergency."

"I shall be honored with your confidence, and if you want a mild-mannered, soft-spoken man, you need look no farther."

"Mr. Smith has just told us some painful news."

"Most unhappy to hear it," replied Mr. Pepper. "We've had a surfeit of such news lately."

"The man who visited us and persuaded dear Lucy to elope is no cousin of ours."

"Certainly not," assented Mr. Pepper. "I'd never acknowledge such a scoundrel."

"You don't understand, John. He represented himself to be Edward Stoner, our cousin, while he was only John Smith, and a perfect stranger."

"Stop a bit, Alice. I can't follow you."

"Listen. Edward Stoner—here present—traveled with John Smith who has carried off my sister. He had from Cousin Edward a full account of the family, and the consequence is he passed himself off as our cousin with the result that followed."

"You don't mean to tell me the man who carried off our Lucy was not her Cousin Edward, but some unknown person? And you don't know who he is or anything about him?" shouted the amazed giant.

Alice nodded her head. "But please keep your temper and moderate your voice. Papa must know nothing of this yet. Remember what you promised."

Mr. Pepper was immensely distressed at this news.

He stormed and roared round like a mad bull, and all they could do or say could not quiet him.

“Now, by all the gods of the world, Chinese, Indian or African, but I’ll have revenge for this dastardly deed. Yes, by my beard, his blood shall pay for it.”

“Hush!” cried the horrified Alice. “Would you murder him? Do control yourself and be quiet. You know what you promised. We want help, John, help, not more troubles piled on us.”

“Yes, yes, Alice, I’m a peaceable man and always shun violence, but I’d like to shake his treacherous life out of his body. Oh, my poor Lucy! Oh, my dear sister! What a blow is here! This is too heavy. Excuse me, ladies. This grief has made a child of me—but some gentle punishment now—you won’t deny me that—just a quiet horse-whipping.”

“It’s plain to be seen, Cousin Alice,” said Edward, aside, “your intended will make matters worse if you don’t restrain him.”

“Allow me to correct you, sir. He is not my intended, although my very good friend.”

“Friend or lover, he must control himself. Come, Mr. Pepper,” continued Edward, “we want your advice first and your help afterward in whatever action we decide to take.”

“Say on, Mr. Edward, I’m with you. I’ll be as gentle as a young lamb.”

“In my opinion,” said Alice, “the first thing is to find poor Lucy and get her home again and away from this villian.”

“But the greatest caution must be used,” said Ed-

ward. "John Smith, if that is his name, is well versed in the ways of the world. He'll know how to conceal himself and Lucy, if he wishes, and again, there's no denying he's a most attractive scamp. Lucy may be so infatuated she may refuse to leave him."

"Not after she hears of his deception," roared Mr. Pepper.

"Yes, even then," replied Edward. "He may be able to influence her. I think we four should go down to Portland at once, divide ourselves among the hotels and boarding houses, and, if possible, find them. After that we must be governed by circumstances. But no violence, Mr. Pepper. If he can show himself to be a proper man, now they are married, it may be best—it may be necessary to forgive him to save Lucy. We must manage this very carefully. If he hears we are after him they may disappear beyond finding. He is the making of a fine man. Don't let us censure him too severely. It may come out all right, but as we don't know anything about him he must not be suffered to carry Lucy away beyond help. On all accounts, and especially for her father's sake, she must be found and brought home, and if he must come too, why we must make the best of it."

The young people explained to Mr. Stoner that evening that they had decided it was best to wait no longer to hear from Lucy, and they would all go down to Portland by the steamboat and spend some time there in quiet search, and when found would never leave her until she was safe at home again, with or without a husband, as might happen.

“Truly, I don’t know why my dear child should keep away. It was a foolish act, but I forgive them, and if Lucy will only come home again I don’t care what else happens.”

They were frightened next day to hear that Mr. Pepper had left early in the morning, leaving word for them to follow at their leisure.

“It will never do,” said Edward, “to have Mr. Pepper and Smith alone together in the same city. If they happen to meet harm will surely come of it. There is nothing left for us but to go on the next boat.”

IX.

THE Widow Pepper felt very much for Mr. Stoner under all these afflictions.

She was a shrewd business woman, very wide awake and cautious; but we all have our weakness. Hers was for Farmer Stone.

He was just her idea of a man, and while some might calculate how immensely the farmer would gain by adding the widow's handsome acres to his own, Mrs. Pepper views the situation from the reverse light and thought the farmer's acres would annex beautifully to hers, making together the grandest farm in the State.

It is true Mr. Stoner had two daughters, but that made no difference. One of them was now out of the way, and where could Jakey find a better wife than Alice. She could see no reason why that should prevent her appropriating the farmer. If there was any difficulty about the double marriage, the more reason why she should push forward her little affair promptly. Jakey had all the world to choose from to find a suitable wife; but there was only one man fit to succeed her precious Jacob, or fill the aching vacuum in her breast.

Being, as we have said, a prompt business woman, she felt at once how lonely Mr. Stoner would be with all his family away. It was certainly her duty, as a good

neighbor and old friend, to go over often and keep him company, and try to cheer him up.

The farmer was in very low spirits, and no wonder, poor man. He took it very kindly in Mrs. Pepper to drive over the first afternoon he was left alone. She even brought him a little pot of jam, made with her own hands, and very comforting she assured him.

"What I say," said the Widow Pepper, "is to keep up your spirits, whatever happens, and all the rest will take care of itself. When my poor Jacob was alive, and no man could be made more comfortabler than he was, and why he should die and him only fifty, I never could make out; and with a fine, smart, young, good-natured, managing wife, although I do have to say it myself, as perhaps hadn't ought to."

"I'm sure," put in the farmer, "no man ever had a better wife."

"I'm obliged to you, Mr. Stoner, and I will admit I like to be understood and valued. Some people think I'm only fond of money, but that's a great mistake, and the fact is I've that land, and money lent out, and no one to attend to it;—it's enough to drive a poor woman crazy. Jakey is of no kind of use, and thinks no more of going off and leaving his poor mother in this desolate and forsaken state."

Here the widow was obliged to stop a little to take breath and wipe her eyes.

"What with them gals in the dairy a-runnin' after the men, and the men about the place a-follerin' after the gals, it's more trouble than all my money. For that I will say, and have told them a thousand times,

the gals have no cause to meddle with the men till after they're married. After that it's accordin' to Scripture, and I'm not goin' agin the Bible. I says to them, ses I—if it was your own mothers they couldn't keep the men off you better than I do; but it's precious little thanks you get from young people nowadays."

"I'm sure," said the farmer, "you do your whole duty by them."

"Oh, it's a sad and sorry life I've led since I've been left a lone widow." And Mrs. Pepper tried very hard to look sad and sorry, but she looked fat and jolly instead. "And as for putting your business in the hands of lawyers—well then—I wouldn't trust one of them. old or young. If you'll believe me, they want to be paid every time you make them a visit. The idea of bein' paid for nothing but talk and maybe advice. Why, I'd no more think of chargin' any one for advice, and as for talk, what er our tongues made for? Indeed I'm that pulled down in my spirits I get no more nor eight or nine hours sleep a night, and even pancakes with jam for breakfast do me no good. My poor Jacob always said to me, when he was low. 'Sarah,' ses he, 'I feel out-er-sorts and kinder reduced in my mind,' and I alles say to him, 'Jacob, my dear, you shall have cakes and jam for breakfast, and that'll cheer you up. If you keep up your spirits,' ses I, 'you'll always feel brighter.' When he got that bad he couldn't eat his cakes and jam then I know'd he couldn't hold out. The doctor said he died of consumption, but I knew better, he died for want of eatin'; but there's no use trying to

dispute with them doctors, they're that conceited in their minds."

"I never meddle with either lawyers or doctors," said the farmer.

"Well, then," continued the widow, "there never was two people more alikes in their minds nor me and you. When I found how it was with the lawyers, you couldn't ask them a civil question but they wanted you to pay for it, I made up my mind I'd just go and consult my oldest and best friend. He's not a man to grudge a kind word to an old friend, or want to charge a lonely woman for every word that slips out of his mouth."

Here the widow was obliged to rest again to take breath and wipe her eyes. She had never felt her unprotected condition so keenly before. The farmer was so warm-hearted; to whom could she confide if not to this old friend?

"I'm sure," said the farmer, "I always pitied your lonesome life and no one to comfort or sympathize with you, for of course children don't count." The poor man heaved a heavy sigh.

"You may well say that," resumed the widow—she was having a good talk and enjoying herself to the full. "As for a son—well there—boys are no use, but girls are worse. You can say to a son, Jakey, go ride out to the back fields and see how the corn grows—but tho' you know's well's you see him he'll never go near the fields, but ride straight off to a neighbor's in case there's any girls about; still you get him off and he can't worrit you agin till dinner time; but as for the gals, you're never rid of them till you git them married off,

and even then there's always danger of them coming back on your hands. But I must say to you, Mr. Stoner, you're a born saint or you never could have brought up two such fine girls—poor motherless darlings—how I love them—but it's a great risk, Mr. Stoner, and the older they get and the more they're married the greater the danger. You ought to have married long ago, if you'll excuse me as a dear old friend for plain speaking. If you'd had a good mother round to look after your daughters this thing never could have happened; and now they tell me Alice—as sensible a young woman as ever I see—is crazy after that new friend of Miss Helen's that was payin' you a visit.”

The farmer started with horror at this suggestion. Was there to be more of this trouble?

“Yes, it's my belief he's after Alice, and she's gone off with him. Two daughters and both gone off and left their poor father to eat his meals alone, and no one to cook for him but an abandoned old creature, that they do say is not right in her mind, and can swear harder than any man about the place. Well there, I don't suppose you'll ever get your daughters to live with you again, and indeed you mustn't expect it, with men of their own, and no one to look after you and this large place but that old Charity. I'm sorry for you from the bottom of my heart, and would do anything in my power to help you, and that thankful after all the good advice you've given me and the money you've saved me; and I've said, and don't care who knows it, you're the best friend I ever had, and have always been a dear kind man to me.” The widow stopped

again and looked at the farmer so kindly. How could she help it, the friend he had always been to her.

Mr. Stoner heaved a great sigh—he certainly was a very lonely man and she certainly was a fine figure of a woman—and there was not the least doubt as to the number of acres of improved land.

There's no telling how long the widow might have continued comforting the farmer, nor indeed what might not have happened but for an interruption.

Charity, from her point of look-out—the kitchen porch—had witnessed the arrival of Mrs. Pepper and timed her stay by the clock. Although the widow and all her ways were just poison to Charity, yet she had such a wholesome fear of her, and respect for her master, she dared not for a long time interfere.

She relieved her mind somewhat by swearing at the little Dutch girl, kept partly for this useful purpose. Then she took to polishing up her kitchen, and although she rubbed her tins fairly in holes, it failed entirely in having the usual pious effect, while the widow was enjoying herself with Mr. Stoner.

“The brass of her,” said Charity, with many words of emphasis—and here the advantage of having a Dutch assistant was very apparent, for Charity would scold and talk ugly when she was roused, and it was very wearing to the feelings of one who understood her; but to this fat, good-tempered maid, who couldn't understand a word that was said, it was just the same as if Charity was all the time pouring out blessings. Disgust at the widow's long stay at length got the better of Charity's prudence. She could hold in no longer. She

marched boldly out, as she said, to put an end to the widow's maneuvers. "Which I know'd it ud be so if she ever got the darters out of way. No man alive kin stan' the soft soap of them widders."

"Excuse my politeness," said Charity, bursting in between them. "Oh, how do you do, Widow Pepper? I didn't know as how 'twas you standin' out here in the yard all mornin', and Mr. Stoner never had the strength to ask you in the house, tho' I don't suppose you'd fare to feel as how it mought be proper to come in alone with the farmer, now the gals are both away, for people will talk, and scandal's easy to raise and hard to lay, and I've heard people say a man's a goner if a widder so much's gets eyes on him, but you know better'n that, Widder Pepper, for you've looked at Mr. Stoner mor'n fifteen year an' no harm's come of it yet. But, as I was sayin'. Mr. Stoner, there's a man been waitin' above two hours, and wants to see you most important, but I wouldn't stir, as I thought every minute as how the widow would be goin', as I s'posed she wouldn't want to stay round the place long and no ladies 'bout to see her. But! la! there's no one more welcome than the Widow Pepper, and goodness knows a woman of her age ought to be able to go round anywheres."

During this speech Mrs. Pepper looked at Charity with a calm and pleased expression. She was not going to be put out by any hateful old witch, and all the time Charity was enjoying her spiteful speeches, the widow was quietly calculating to herself, that if circumstances came around different, cases might be altered in the farmer's household. But the pleased countenance of

Mrs. Pepper only aggravated Charity worse, and Mr. Stoner was in terror as to the result of this skirmish.

"Charity," interrupted Mr. Stoner, "Mrs. Pepper has been kind enough to bring you round a pot of jam of her own making. She says it's extra nice on pancakes, and——"

"Oh! la! there—we've that loads of jam left over we're obliged to feed it to the farm hands; but as for putting jam on hot cakes, if you'll excuse my politeness, I wouldn't have it on my conscience to do such a thing. I've heard of one man killed by that kind of messing, and I don't want anything said agin my cookin' when I'm dead and gone. No man fed on trash can live to sixty years, an' that's the gospel truth. If I'd been guilty of jammin' any man into his grave I couldn't lay quiet in my own."

But the widow was proof against all Charity's thrusts, and looked as pleased as if an avalanche of compliments had covered her. The farmer stood by in silent admiration. Never had the widow risen so high in his estimation as when he assisted her into her carriage, and noticed that not so much as one little ribbon had been ruffled by Charity's tirade.

"Don't apologize," said Mrs. Pepper. "Not a word, my dear friend. I know very well how things go about a place when there's no wife around to regulate matters. It ain't your fault, poor man, but indeed I pity you, being at the mercy of such a witch as that. I'd dull her tongue for her in short order."

"Would you, now," said the farmer, admiringly, and he gave the widow a smile so full of meaning that on her

way home she decided it might be better to have made up at once the new black silk dress she had been saving since the death of Jacob the first. As she remarked to the dressmaker next day: "Silks are in danger of spoilin' if kept too long."

Mrs. Sowmans smiled. She was a widow herself and understood the feelings of a woman left desolate.

"Your old bonnet will never do to wear with this fine silk," remarked that lady; and after a while both these comfortable widows laid down their sewing and had a good laugh. They were such good-natured kindly widows that every time they looked at one another during the whole afternoon, they put down their work and had a quiet laugh together.

The consequence was the widow went to town next day and ordered a new bonnet without regard to cost, a thing so unprecedented as to create an immediate excitement. The shape, style and cost of that bonnet was known through the whole town that night. But the gossips were mystified. Such a bonnet must have a meaning, but where was the dress to match. The most diligent inquiries failed to find that black silk so long hid away.

"I feel so faint somehow to-day," said Mrs. Pepper to her confidant.

"I don't wonder," replied Mrs. Sowmans, "and how you keep up with all this business to worrit you and not a man about to give you a bit of advice or a word of comfort, it passes me."

The widow gave a great sigh, denoting her worried and lonely condition.

"Mr. Stoner's the only man in the county whose advice I value a fig, but I can't be running over there all the time. Now the girls are away folks might talk, and old Charity's so spiteful."

"Well, Mrs. Pepper, they talk anyway, so you might just's well make yourself comfortable. If I was you, now, I'd just write a note and tell Mr. Stoner how worried you are about business, and can't be goin' over there all the time, and if he'll just drop in and stay to supper you'd take it kindly."

"Don't you think it would look kinder queer?"

"You might have a little supper and invite old Parson Prose at the same time."

"Well, I can't have the parson without bringin' his wife along. Yes, I think I ought to have the Proses to tea—it's all one expense, and now the new silk's done I might as well show it."

"Them men," said Mrs. Sowmans, "are jest that stupid and slow they never know what's good for them, onless you jest arrange all their affairs for them like a suit of clothes, and put it on them. Then they're satisfied and happy. Merciful Saunders, I mind how it was with my Jonas. He jest dilly-dallied round until I was sick of seein' him—so at last, I jest up and ses to him: 'What are you hankerin' after,' ses I. 'There's a minister livin' in the next street, ain't there?' He felt his hand round in his pocket in a sheepish kind of way and ses he—'Here's a dollar; supposin' we go round and spend it on the preacher,' and with that—well—that's how it was, you know. But, poor man, he was killed the very next week in an accident, and you might say that dollar was jest's good's thrown away—clean wasted.

But what I say's this—a man don't half know his own mind till it's put in his head."

* * * * *

The parson came in his shining black—the farmer in sober brown—Mrs. Prose wore her furs. It was rather warm, but she always looked well in furs. Mrs. Pepper wore the new silk with a few bright ribbons in her hair.

Mr. Stoner was surprised at her fine appearance. "You look just like a young bride," said he, smiling at her. The widow blushed, as became her at the farmer's playful manner.

"There's a parson here," said she with modest eyes cast down.

Well—that's how it was—and it all happened so suddenly, the farmer was married before he recovered his surprise, and hardly realized what had occurred. When the evening drew on and Mr. and Mrs. Prose departed, Mr. Stoner bid his bride an affectionate good-by and drove off home in an abstracted manner.

"Well, upon my word," exclaimed Mrs. Sowmans, "if that don't beat the Dutch."

"Never mind," said the ex-widow—"never mind. He's all right; only a little confused at the suddenness of it. He's slow but he's safe and sure. I've got the best man in the State of Oregon, and he shall please himself in everything. He'll get it all through his head to-night and will be over here by to-morrow night."

The whole thing was done so quietly, the story hardly got out the next day. All the gossips admitted afterwards, that whether it was to squeeze a penny, or steal a wedding, the widow beat the county.

X.

THE farmer took his breakfast, the next morning, alone. He was considerably surprised at last evening's proceedings. Not that he objected in the least. It was all right and entirely satisfactory, and he was amazingly tickled with the widow's management of the whole affair. She was a bright widow and a woman any man might be proud to call his wife. But then there were troublesome matters that must be settled at once.

The widow would expect him to ask her to come home and live with him. Such a course would not be unnatural under the circumstances; but what would Charity say to that, and what would the girls think? Fortunately they were out of the way at present, and matters could all be arranged before their return home. Would Charity allow him to bring the widow home without making things very unpleasant?

Undoubtedly the widow was smart enough to manage Charity in time, but it would cost many a sharp skirmish, and many a tough battle before peace was conquered.

It was a dreadful position for a quiet man to be placed in, but there seemed no help for it now. He thought it all over in every shape, and always considered her as the Widow Pepper. He chuckled when he

remembered how she put through the wedding and had it all over before any one understood what was going on. Perhaps the others were not so slow in taking it in as the farmer supposed. Certain it is that the Widow Pepper, aided and abetted by the Widow Sowmans, fully comprehended the whole situation.

Oh, she was a brave widow and a smart business woman. He must do his best to arrange matters amiably with Charity, and have everything in comfortable shape before the girls came home. His own situation was so embarrassing he almost forgot the trouble about Lucy that lay like lead around his heart. Charity would cut up pretty rough and talk pretty hard, to say the best of it, but the widow was not easily put out, and perhaps she'd smile through the whole thing.

But he was very much mistaken if he supposed his new wife would smile at any such performance as Charity was accustomed to carry on, to the terror of the whole household. Mrs. Pepper gave herself no trouble on the score of Charity's objection.

Charity was able to let off a good deal of steam by scolding at her Dutch assistant, whose convenient ignorance of English enabled her to enjoy Charity's tirades just the same as if compliments. It was a happy arrangement, and will be found useful under like circumstances.

The farmer ate his breakfast in silence. He was regaling himself with cakes—pancakes, but he didn't find the widow's jam so delicious as he expected. It was too sour for his taste. Poor man, how was he to know that Charity had been improving its quality with

a little vinegar, for she was determined to outwit the widow by fair means or foul.

Little did she know, poor helpless old woman, that the widow had stolen a march on her, and the case was already past mending.

Gretchen carried in and put down the cakes with no more noise than the usual stumbling over chairs and slamming doors, but that didn't disturb the farmer's meditations.

The jam was disappointing. He tried more sugar—no use—nothing would sweeten it. Was it ominous of the widow's temper? It's true he had admired her so many years it always made him lonesome to meet her. She had always appeared in the best humor to him!—but there were rumors—he had heard she could make things pretty lively when put out.

Was it too late? If the widow once got her foot in the house it would be too late, but being as yet out could Charity keep her out? And then, above all, did he want her kept out? There were momentous questions. In the midst of all these doubtful cogitations, Charity herself brought in the concluding plate of cakes.

"I hope you find the Widow Pepper's jam very nice," said Charity, by way of opening the battle.

"Very good," replied the farmer.

"Well, I'm glad you like it, because I can save a deal of sugar in all kinds of sasses. Its a little too sour for my taste, but they say them wimmin of Dutch kin like things sour. They tell me she gives them nothing but sourcrout for supper, even when she has company."

"She gave us a good supper last night," said the farmer, off his guard.

"Oh! la! well I s'posed you tuck supper there, but in corse she wouldn't mind the cost of a supper, if so be's she could capture a man with the bait. Them widder's powerful disignin'. I've heard tell they could marry a man afore he knowed what ailed him. I dunno myself, but hev heard of sich things. I know widder's allers considered most dangerous to old men."

The old gentleman winced. Had she heard of the last night's performances already? He wished he had the widow there to defend him.

Charity had stood by him through all his troubles—had attended his children with the care and love of a mother. She was a privileged character and must have her own way, but he felt it was a great pity her way was so rough and her temper so spiteful. What a contrast was the widow—always smooth and smiling, and in high good humor.

The farmer twisted around in his chair uneasily. The business would have to be explained to Charity and some kind of peace or compromise patched up, but he didn't know how to begin, and felt very helpless and wished himself well out of it.

"Charity, I'm an old man, and begin to feel the want of some one to take care of me."

"Well there! You're not a youth, that's a fact, but it's flyin' in the face of Providence to say you want some one to take care of you, and sich a home as you've got, and sich darters as the whole round world can't ekall—but I'm not a bit surprised you're feelin' bad this

mornin', and you up last night till ten o'clock. You're not used to sich doin's and can't stand it, sir; and the rheumatiz in every blessed bone of your body, and that jam you've been eatin's enough to upset the stommage of an oysterage. I wish to heavings the young ladies was at home. I don't see how young gals can be so on-reasonable, leavin' their pa alone at his time o' life, and widders round's thick's blackberries. I know they'd be shocked to hear you'd been out till eleven o'clock every night, and how that Widder Pepper can have the scandalous brass to have men visitin' her at nights and stoppin' till twelve o'clock, and she a lone woman and old enough to know better—goodness knows. The church will hear of it, Mr. Stoner, and it'll take a deal of whitewashin' to clear your coat, and I misdoubt you'll not escape scot-free, and I hope the committee'll not be askin' me to swear what time you got home, and so I make bold to tell ye."

"Well, it wasn't so late, Charity, and there's no use getting ill-natured and excited about it. I suppose I'm old enough to go out alone if I want to; and as for the widow's character, she's able to look after that herself. Don't worry about it at all."

"Now the Lord save us and defend us from such innocence. Whoever doubted the Widder Pepper was able to take care of herself, and she left a widder just when most convenient. I don't say she pisened her husband, but things do come round mighty convenient sometimes. Don't think the good Lord does business to 'blige people in that way."

"Charity, it's foolish to talk so."

“Well, I don’t say she put arsenic in his vittals, for after I’ve tasted that jam o’ hern I see it ain’t necessary. There be ways o’ cookin’ ’ll put any *old* man out of the way jest’s convenient as pisen; and this I will say, and no man can deny it, five hundred acres good land and a contrary old man is a great temptation to any woman. I know I wouldn’t care to stay alone with her till the middle of the night, and a dark night at that.”

“Well, there, it wasn’t after nine when I left, and I wasn’t alone either, Mrs. Sowmans was there too.”

“La! now, my word! pretty company to introduce to respectable folks and his daughters away from home too. Mrs. Sowmans, indeed! Calls herself a widder too. I’d like to know what’s become of her husband. I never saw him. Alone with *two* widders! Well, well!”

The farmer didn’t like to let out the presence of the clergyman and his wife; but being hard pressed, he could not refrain from defending himself.

“Charity, you spiteful old heathen, you’d try the patience of Job. Why, Mr. and Mrs. Proser were both there, and we all took supper with Mrs. Pepper.”

“Oh-o-o!” This was too much for Charity. She retired at once without a word, thoroughly frightened.

“She’s practisin’ on him,” she said to herself, “and gittin’ him gradously up to the pint; but as I’m a livin’ sinner I’ll circumvole that widder yet. If I only had him safe in bed now with a solid chronic, and keep him there till the gals come home, but ef he sociates with widders and parsons round loose too—he’s a lost man beyond salvagement.

“Alack a day, them old men is allers the most fool-

ishest, 'specially ef they've been married afore. A burnt child *don't* dread the fire. This is a jeubus world, and 'onest saints like me have a very poor show. Ef I could write a letter now and bring Miss Alice back quick, but dear-e-me—'tis a sad world, and readin' an' 'ritin' wasn't known in my young days.

"Get out o' the way, you fat Dutch bunch. Why didn't your onnery parents teach you to write a decent letter for a body, and not let a gal grow up without a decent word to her back."

"Well, mam, ven you vish I furstay English—ride him a leddle too."

"What! what!" cried Charity, fairly knocked over with amazement, "I thought you didn't know a word of English, and me talking to you for months and never a word out of your mouth. What'd you mean by sich silence?"

"Whol, day tole me de ony way to get by mit you vas nod to onderstand nodings. I'm paid dat vay."

"Well," said Charity, looking blue fire—"but here, if you can write me a letter, we'll call it square."

"I can write better as any ting in German. I write gut English too."

Charity proceeded to explain her views of the situation in language more forcible than elegant, and requested Gretchen to put all that down.

With may twists and contortions Gretchen succeeded in producing a letter which Charity thought would suit. It was promptly backed with the name and posted—Miss Alice Stoner—but as for any farther address

neither of them thought of it—being in fact the first letter ever produced by the united pair.

“CHARITY, HER LEDDER.

“LIEBER FRAULIN,—

“Sharity says ven you doan come home sometimes purdy quick alreddy, some tings will habben more as you like doan’t he. Sharity says widders und parsons und faders togeder sometimes efery night, you hav a stepmoder more sooner as you like.

“So no more, from

“SHARITY.”

Towards evening Charity tried various little artifices to detain the farmer; but when she saw him drive off and heard him boldly order her to leave the door unlocked, as he might be late, she began to realize the widow was gaining rapidly.

When Mr. Stoner reached the widow’s, he was received with distinction. The story was suspected and all the farm people were pleased at the final success of their side, for Mr. Stoner was well liked, and this was considered quite the proper ending to a long siege.

There was a bright wood fire on the hearth—an excellent little supper, just they two—waited on by a tidy young maid. Everything in perfect order—so beautifully clean and deliciously quiet. No thought of leaving that house more passed through his brain. No

thought of exchanging that smiling, happy wife for the vixen at home.

The farmer leaned back in his great armchair, and for the moment he was altogether happy forgetting all his recent troubles about poor Lucy, and forgetting even Charity in the comforts of the hour. Presently a shade passed over his face, and was quickly noticed by his attentive wife.

"Never mind, my dear, about your daughters. Lucy will come home all right, and I'll treat them both so handsomely they must be pleased. Yes, they will make no trouble. I'm proud to call them my daughters, the handsomest and the best in the State. Yes, and don't you worry about Charity either. I'll settle her pretty quick."

"You don't know Charity," sighed the farmer, "and then remember I am under great obligations to her."

"I don't agree with you, my dear, in the least, but I'm going to act just as if I did, and Charity shall be satisfied to her heart's content. I think she's no longer fit to have charge of the young ladies, and I'm surprised you've stood it so long. You know my opinion of her. She's an old weazened witch, with a copper-lined throat and a steel-pointed tongue; but never mind, for your sake she shall be pensioned off handsomely and retire, not only happy and content, but in good humor. You stay at home to-morrow, Mr. Stoner, and look after your new farms here, for dear knows they need attention. In the morning I'll drive over and settle matters with Charity, and then if by good luck we hear from the girls that Lucy is all well, why how happy we'll be."

The farmer embraced and kissed his new wife heartily. He was a happy man, indeed.

When Charity found out the next morning the farmer had never come home at all, she decided he was going too far, and determined to have it out with him and give him such a piece of her mind as a church elder ought to hear under such scandalous conduct. But her dismay was complete when the ex-widow drove up alone and boldly called out for Charity to come and speak to her.

“I want to give you a chance to be the first to congratulate me. I’m Mrs. Stoner now—was married night before last.” The old lady leaned back in her wagon, enjoying with complacent satisfaction the disgust Charity could not conceal.

“We don’t intend living here, nor yet my daughters—my place is so much better and more comfortable. We’ll shut this house up and won’t want your services any more; but of course we’re bound to do the fair thing by you. I’ve been thinking as you have plenty of money saved up to live on the interest, and not touch the principal; we’ll give you the choice of any house you fancy on this place, and Mr. Stoner don’t want you to work a stroke more as long as you live. Now isn’t that liberal? come.”

“Well, mem, if you’ll excuse——”

“But remember, in consideration of such handsome treatment—rent free—all your life, we expect you to keep a civil tongue in your head, as we don’t care to pay for abuse—can get that for nothing—any time.”

“Well, mem, if you’re speaking for my master, and

he offers me a house to myself, rent free, I thank him."

"Well, I should think you would."

"And no more work all my life, I thank him. I've no particular thirst after work."

"Lucky woman indeed."

"But there's one objection I make to your plan, square and solid."

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Stoner, delighted to find the objections reduced to one, when she anticipated a hundred. "Just say what you want and you'll find me anxious to please you."

"Well, mem, since you're so kind, if you'll excuse my politeness, since you've come out ahead—and it's jest what might be expected since widders are so perseverin' an' men are sich fools—I'll accept the house free and no work, if Mr. Stoner don't want me to work, but as for livin' on my own money, principal or interest, I wonder how a 'onest married widder-woman could have the face to 'sinuate sech—which I never did live on my money, and never will—not if I had to die fur it. I don't insist on work, since I want to oblige you, but what I ses, I want my full wages."

"Well, there now!" exclaimed Mrs. Stoner. "You don't mean to tell me out in the open daylight you want your wages when you don't work?"

"Yes, mem; I don't care anything about the work. I'm willin' to stop work to 'blige Mr. Stoner, but I want my wages jest the same. I'd call it most onreasonable to expect a old woman to spend her money she's been savin' all her life jest to live on——"

"Why you crazy old—— If I had my way I'd have you turned off, bag and baggage."

"Don't be callin' no names, Widder Pepper; you can't have your way with me same's you hed with the poor old man. I don't budge a step till I've had my wages settled and all down in black and white. My master's not the man to turn off an old servant without full pay, so there."

"Come now," said Mrs. Stoner, beginning to realize she was getting the worst of it; "say rent free and half wages for life. That's a handsome offer, and you ought to jump at it."

"No, mem, if you'll excuse my age, I won't jump at anything. You give me the little house by the gate and full wages for life and what little flour, coals and trifles a poor woman needs to keep body and soul together, an' I don't mind sayin' you're a smart woman."

"Call it three-quarters," pleaded Mrs. Stoner.

"Never; but if you fix it as I say I don't mind tellin' around it was your liberality, though I doubt if anybody'll believe me, if you'll excuse my mentionin' it."

The old lady was defeated. Charity had a triumph and enjoyed the discomfiture of her old enemy. But Mr. Stoner was fully satisfied when she told her husband of the liberal arrangements she had made on his behalf, and how well pleased Charity was. Money was of no account, and his good wife did exactly right.

That evening the good man looked long and lovingly at his wife, and at last he spoke up.

"Sarah, I didn't believe there was man or woman alive who could manage old Charity, much less to dull

her tongue. Now if you're only able to satisfy my daughters as well."

"My dear," said she, taking him affectionately by the hand, "be comfortable and happy. That's what I want—and leave all the little troubles to me."

XI.

BEHOLD now these good people within the delights of a second honeymoon. To the comfort and satisfaction of good health, ample wealth and a peaceful household, were added congenial companionship worthy of all love and honor.

His strong mind and sound judgment relieved her of the worry and vexation of an increasing business.

Her cheerful spirit, affectionate admiration, and watchful anticipation of all his wants, supplied what had been long needed to fill up the measure of his life.

But all his wife's arts were not sufficient to charm away that ever-present grief, nor all her arguments strong enough to lift that painful burden from a fond father's heart.

"A plague on them pesky girls," thought Mrs. Stoner, "why couldn't they stay at home and behave themselves when they have everything that love and money could do for them. And Jakey off after them too—dear! dear! it's a weary world. It's plain to be seen my good husband can never be happy without his daughters, though how to get them back or what's best to be done is beyond a poor woman's ken."

And so it was, two people most happy, and yet most miserable. The more the old lady studied it over the

less she could see her way. As for leaving it to time or the young people to straighten matters out, that would be simply absurd. Her idea, when anything was wrong, was to do something herself and do it promptly, but she found the situation here too complicated, and with all her planning she could make nothing of it.

At last a happy thought. It was hardly through her brain when she was on her way to the little doctor's. He was the man to help her. Had he not given Jacob wonderful advice and made a man of him. He would be able to see through this mystery and show her how to straighten out all these tangled affairs.

The little doctor, gazing through his blinds disconsolate, was pleased to see an old lady get out of her wagon and ascend his steps. No doubt a patient—no doubt a fee—perhaps, indeed, a regular fever—two visits a day and the bill paid down in cash. No wonder the doctor received the lady with cordial politeness. He had never seen her, had no idea who she was; evidently a woman with a large family and promised great possibilities.

Do you think a doctor should not count so, and estimate his patients at their value in dollars and cents? Why not? He has his bread and butter to make as well as the rest of us. Why, even the good pastor, whom we all esteem as a most worthy, pious man, views with satisfaction the heavy contribution of the rich man, although he knows the widow's mite is just as acceptable in the eyes of the Lord. The mite is a good coin and passes current with heaven, but for earthly works he prefers checks.

If the widow gives her all, the mite is accepted as of infinite value. The rich man appears to have no desire to secure the same credit.

Nevertheless, the good pastor is right to have a proper eye to his receipts. His church demands are very pressing, and good deeds or good wishes won't settle the bills.

Jones objects to the constant cry for money from the church. He would prefer to settle his dues by good deeds, which he carefully limits to himself and his immediate family, but it won't do, Mr. Jones. Everything in this world must be done on a cash basis. So, to come back to our story, the doctor must not be blamed for counting up in advance the profits to come from Mrs. Stoner's visit. Being comfortably seated, the good lady had some difficulty in opening the conversation. She would like to have the doctor's opinion as to the best course to pursue, but she didn't want to lay open the family troubles.

"Now, my good madam," said the doctor, after considerable delay, bowing politely.

"Well, it's not for myself I've called——"

"Certainly not ; any one can see you have no need of the profession."

"There is a man of my acquaintance, doctor, who has everything almost that heart can desire—plenty of money" (she always put money first)—"good health—affectionate children—a devoted wife——"

"I'm sure of that," said the doctor, smiling pleasantly.

“—and yet,” continued the lady, “he is not happy—his mind is out of health——”

“I see—you would know if I could minister to a mind diseased?”

“Exactly, doctor; you understand me exactly.”

“Well, madam, a doctor could no more prescribe for a mental than a physical disease without knowing something of the cause and symptoms.”

As the old lady made no reply the doctor continued:

“If you could give me now some hint of the why and wherefore, I will do my best to help you.”

“Suppose, doctor, the case of such a man as I have described having two lovely daughters—that one of them should run off and marry her cousin, and yet there is no reason for such an elopement. Her father had no objection, and he appears to be a fine, handsome young fellow.”

“Well, ma’am, what cause of anxiety should there be in this? Such things are unpleasant to the father and exciting in the family, and perhaps give Mrs. Grundy something to talk about, but after all, common sense requires the father to forgive his daughter, receive her and her husband home, and make the best of it. Any other course would but prolong the scandal and increase the distress of all interested. I see no other course to follow in this case, and if you will take my advice, madam, I can promise you a speedy and perfect cure.”

Mrs. Stoner heard the doctor attentively, but remained in deep thought. Although she had not been told the whole story, yet, putting all she had heard and witnessed together, she had a shrewd suspicion of the true state of

the case. It was whispered round that the last arrival was Helen's cousin. If so, the other was false, as there was but one cousin.

The doctor understood now well enough who his new visitor was. The elopement had created a great sensation through town and country, and was discussed in all its known and imagined details.

"But suppose, doctor, instead of running off with her cousin, to whom, personally, there could be no objection, the young lady had disappeared with a scamp of whom nothing whatever was known? Where would your common sense be then? what words could heal that wound?"

The doctor started. This was a new and much more serious story. Such calamities as that are not healed by words.

After a long silence he said, bowing, "Mrs. Stoner, —for I think it right to let you know that I am now acquainted with you,—if the last is the true story, then the situation is grave indeed, and neither words nor any other thing can ease the anguish of such a blow. Time alone can soften such a sorrow, but the remembrance of it continues as long as life itself."

Mrs. Stoner bowed her head in silence. The tears trickled through her hands. Was it to be so? just as she had reached the goal of all her strivings. Was this fatal folly to put an end to all hopes of future happiness? She knew her husband too well to imagine that if such ill came to his beloved there was left for him any more joy on earth.

"And yet," continued the doctor, desiring to give

her all the comfort he was able, "bear in mind we sometimes anticipate great evils which never befall—we sink appalled at the weight of burdens we are never called upon to take up. Let us not faint until we are overcome. Your present greatest misery comes from the thought the dear girl has been taken in by a scamp, but see how easily you might be mistaken. I know the young man you speak of—have seen him several times around the town—of frank, open countenance and noble bearing—genial manners—and pleasant disposition. Such materials do not make a rascal—take my word for that. He may be wild and reckless, and too selfishly pursuing his own pleasures—but he may—he must turn out all right. It is bad enough as it is, but you have no right to suppose the worst until you know there is a worst."

"Doctor, doctor, it comforts me to hear you talk. It's not like listening to a lawyer, when you know every word he uses goes down in the bill. You don't charge for talk, doctor?"

"Certainly not, madam; I'm so fond of hearing myself talk that if I was able I would cheerfully pay people to come here and listen to me."

"Oh! I see you're making fun of me, but the thing that troubles me most is that Mr. Stoner don't know of the last part of this story. He still thinks Lucy has gone away with her cousin. Oh dear, what will happen when he hears the truth?"

"Well, my good madam, at present I would not tell him more than he knows already. All that you can really urge against this young man is that you don't know

him; but consider, if you please, how many superior men there are in the world you never even heard of. And another point very important to keep in mind, while we don't know at present what reasons he pressed to induce Miss Lucy to elope with him,—she is too pure and good a woman to be attracted by a scamp.”

“Well then, doctor, what are we to do?”

“What can you do but wait? The young people, as I understand, have gone in search of the missing pair. They will find them or hear of them. Perhaps bring them back. Then you must make the best of it. Forgive them—take them to your homes again and all will be well.”

“Doctor, I'm very low spirited, but I will say I never met a man whose talk gave such comfort. And very sensible talk too. I never saw such a little man hold such a mass of common sense.”

Mrs. Stoner looked admiringly at the doctor, who appeared smaller to her than he really was. She was so accustomed to large men. The doctor stood five feet eight to the top of his high silk hat, and as for weight he claimed over one hundred.

“Oh, if people would only use plenty of common sense,” said the doctor, “how smoothly the wheels of society would glide along. There's nothing removes friction like your common sense. Such a young man must have at bottom a sterling character and many golden properties. Are all these to be tarnished—swept away by one hasty, inconsiderate act? Can we judge correctly of this act without full knowledge of all the circumstances? Where would be the sense of that?”

“Madam, you show your common sense by coming to a physician for advice under such trying need. To decide what’s best to be done in such distressing circumstances one must understand fully the human subject—body and mind. To strive in this direction is the physician’s duty.

“The law can pursue the suspected and punish the guilty—nor are any of us so innocent as to be over-anxious to be brought to trial. Religion can console the afflicted by promise of a better world to come—but in such cases as this it is the doctor’s place to smooth over family difficulties and relieve, as far as possible, the anxious heart. The great medicine for all mental ills is strong doses of common sense, repeated as occasion demands. Common sense is the grand universal panacea for human troubles. It hides the evil and discovers the good—suppresses pains and increases pleasures—avoids errors and insures success——”

“But, doctor,” interrupted Mrs. Stoner, “if I understand you, the advice you give at present is to wait and do nothing until we hear from the travelers.”

“That’s it precisely, Mrs. Stoner. Do nothing—wait developments.”

“Doctor Little, I’m greatly pleased with your talk—am very glad I came to see. Now as to pay—what——”

“Pray, don’t mention it, Mrs. Stoner.”

“Well, yes! I suppose as we are to do nothing we pay nothing.”

“Exactly!” replied the doctor, seeing all his expected fees slipping away from him, and not knowing

how to save them and at the same time save his own credit.

The thrifty woman bid the doctor good-by and went her way, well pleased with his talk and particularly delighted at the reasonableness of his charges.

XII.

LUCY sat under a wide-spreading oak in the little square in the city of Portland. Her new husband had driven some distance through timber lands to look at a saw-mill offered for sale. He was intent to get into some settled business and provide for his bride, independent of relations. It was the first time she had been alone since her marriage, and she was improving the opportunity to take an inventory, as it were, of her new position, and reckon up all the delightful items that contributed to her happiness, for happy she was to her fullest powers of enjoyment. The separation from her family was the only drawback to her complete content, but she was assured that after a very brief separation to soften the effect of their sudden departure all would end in a complete and joyful reunion. In truth, Mr. Smith was casting around anxiously for some safe means to get out of his present dilemma.

If he was settled in business it might please the father, or at all events, the longer he could put off the explosion, the more chance of something turning up in his favor.

* * * * *

Lucy could scarcely believe her eyes—yet it must be—it was their old friend, John Jacob.

"Why Jakey," she cried, hailing him with joy, "where are you marching to and what are you looking so earnestly around after?" Her heart warmed to this friend of her childhood. It made her feel like being at home again.

"Well, Miss Alice!" exclaimed Mr. Pepper, with astonished delight. "You've found me out already. I thought I'd get a few days' advantage of you and perhaps even have the credit of closing the search before you appeared."

Lucy was amused to see how their old friend was still unable to distinguish between herself and Alice, and determined to let him find out his mistake for himself.

"Tell me," she said, "have you had any success in your search?" She had a pretty good idea what he was hunting for.

"Well, when you made me promise no violence, Alice, I just thought I'd step down ahead and see if I could get in any little revenge without doing harm or breaking my word; for I tell you plainly I can never feel happy till I've paid off that scoundrel for destroying the life of poor Lucy."

Lucy was stunned, shocked. She gazed at him with a look of horror, with trembling limbs and beating heart. She had never dreamt the family would take the elopement in this spirit; to think this giant was pursuing her dear husband, intent on vengeance; it was awful. He must be turned from such dangerous notions at once, before harm was done.

"Don't you look so frightened, Miss Alice. I agreed to no violence, and I'm a man of my word."

"But why do you want to use violence?" gasped Lucy. "What harm has he done? Lucy was just as much to blame as he. She could not be carried off by force."

"Alice, I am astonished at you. To compare our sweet, innocent girl to a man who, to gain his base ends, does not scruple to enter a lovely home under an assumed name, and by representing himself as her cousin, gains such an intimacy and power over the dear girl as to induce her to go off with him; but don't tremble so and look so frightened. I won't hurt him indeed, indeed."

Lucy struggled and tried her utmost to control herself. What was the meaning of this story? What grievous error was the man laboring with, or was there a fatal truth under it all that would be her death-blow? She was overcome with an awful feeling of terror and dread.

"Who is he then?" she gasped. "How do you know he is not our cousin?"

"You do amaze me, Alice, beyond anything. Surely when your Cousin Helen and Edward both arrived there can be no mistake. They were brought up together. Alas, it is only too plain—some adventurer has passed himself off as your Cousin Edward with this fatal result. All there remains for us to do now is to find poor Lucy and rescue her from the clutches of this heartless villain."

Did ever bride hear such a tale as this?

* * * * *

Lucy sat powerless to move or utter a word. Mr. Pepper was not surprised at the emotion of Alice (as he supposed) while he rehearsed the cruel wrongs of her sister.

"Come," said he, "poor dear! when shall we see the end of this. What can we do to help poor Lucy bear the shock? Shall I see you back to your hotel—it's getting dusk—or must we keep apart as arranged?"

Lucy, with a supreme effort, motioned him away.

"Poor Alice," muttered Mr. Pepper, walking away; "no wonder she feels it so much. I pray heaven the business may be brought to some happy conclusion, but it looks dark to me now."

With such gloomy forebodings Mr. Pepper wandered along the street, when to his immense surprise he met Miss Alice, newly arrived, and taking a preliminary look through the city.

Alice hastened towards Mr. Pepper and held out her hand to greet him.

"Oh, you naughty man, to play us such a slip. I hope you've kept out of mischief?"

"How did you get back here so soon? I was just reproaching myself for talking over the whole story with you just now. Every time one thinks of it the story becomes more distressing. You looked so shocked I was afraid to leave you alone. Thankful to see you are yourself again."

"Jacob, what are you talking about? I haven't seen you since we were at Oakland together."

"Then," whispered Mr. Pepper, "it must have been Lucy."

"You saw her and blurted out all that tale?"

"I've killed her," groaned Mr. Pepper, recalling vividly Lucy's looks of terror as he talked to her.

"Show me quick where you met her."

"There, under that clump of trees. She seemed to be waiting for some one; no doubt for her precious husband."

"Now, John, leave me at once. I must see her alone and endeavor to soften this news, or great injury may be done."

Alice hastened away, found the seat under the trees, but her sister was gone.

She looked anxiously in every direction. It was getting dark. The gas lamps were lighted. Soon she espied Mr. John Smith approaching at a rapid pace.

The sight of him was an immense relief. No matter who he was he could bring her quick to her dear sister. She feared terribly some evil effects would follow from Lucy's hearing the awful truth in such an abrupt manner. Before she could think what to say or decide how to receive this hateful man she found herself locked in his arms.

"Oh, my dearest love!" he exclaimed, "it seems years since I left you! How good of you to watch for me, but you should not be out alone so late. Here, take my arm, love, and let's get back to the hotel. When I get supper, I'll tell you all my adventures; but, oh, how I missed my sweet wife."

As Alice involuntarily drew away from him, he said:

“There, I know it’s not decent to be so demonstrative in public, but can a poor man help it when he has been away from his dear girl a whole day?”

Alice took his arm and went along quietly. The point was to get instantly to Lucy. When they entered the little parlor she looked around sharply—not seeing Lucy she hurried into the bedroom adjoining. As soon as it was apparent that Lucy was not in the rooms—for by the dim light she could not at first be certain—her courage failed—she sank down exhausted on the sofa.

“What is the matter, dear?” he said, seating himself beside her. “You seem faint. Oh! I hope you’re not going to be sick.”

“Is not such cruel deception enough to make any one sick? Tell me quick who and what you are and say plainly what can be done to soften this frightful news, which I’m afraid will kill my poor sister.”

He jumped up aghast. “Who has been telling you tales? What have you heard?”

“I have heard all,” replied Alice faintly, “excepting this: We do not know who you are, only who you are not. Can you give such account of your character and proofs of your connections as to show you a fit man to enter a respectable family? If you can do this all may yet be well. I don’t care for money, but, oh, say quick as you desire to make what amends you can and save your poor wife from a breaking heart, are you a proper honest man? Will you make a fit husband for such a wife to have? If that is so all may yet be well.”

“My dear wife, to answer you in one word, my family and education is all you or your friends can ask. For

my character, I will not mention it alongside your pure self; but if an earnest desire to do better counts for anything, count that in my favor, and if a life of devotion and love can make you happy, you shall be a happy wife.

“I feel deeply guilty towards you and was only waiting a favorable moment to confess all and ask pardon, but believe me the extent of my wrong was to win you under a false name. It was not all my fault. When you all received me so joyfully as your cousin I thought at first it was too good a joke to spoil for a day or two. Before the day was over it was too late. It was beyond my power to lose you.

“When it came to marriage I assumed my proper name. That certificate which you were too agitated to notice shows my correct signature, John Smith Devine.

“I’ve been wild, I won’t deny it, and given my poor friends a world of trouble, but ever since I set eyes on you I’ve repented and reformed. If you’ll only love me still, I’ll be and do all you wish and ask.”

Alice sat quietly in the dim light, listening to all his pleadings of love and remorse. It was all as bad as bad could be, and yet it might have been far worse. The awful dread her sister had been enticed away by some nameless adventurer was removed. His earnest words carried conviction with them. If he had been wild, at least he was of good family, had the instincts and education of a gentleman, and the love and care of such a wife as Lucy would bring him around all right. They must all make the best of it.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet, exclaiming wildly:

"Where is Lucy? Let us find her at once. Explain all and relieve her mind from this awful suspense."

Devine was astounded. The true situation flashed upon him at once. "Wait a moment," he cried. "I'll go get her." He rushed out, intent only to find his wife at once and secure her forgiveness.

He soon returned, trembling with alarm. "Where did you see her last? She's not around the hotel. The people thought she came in with me. She must be waiting somewhere in the street to meet me. Stay a moment while I rush down to the little square. She is there waiting for me. I'll find her there I know."

He hurried away again.

A mortal dread seized Alice. If her sister believed this story as told by Mr. Pepper, with all the deceit and crime standing so boldly out, she would never want to see this man again. Far from waiting and watching to meet him, as he supposed, she had fled away to hide her shame.

Presently Devine returned, quite beside himself with agony.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned. "Why did I live to do this thing! If harm comes to my wife it will be worse than death to me. I am her murderer. I have plunged a dagger to the heart of the purest and loveliest woman that ever breathed."

His frantic ravings aroused Alice. Instant measures must be taken to follow Lucy. Not a minute more must be lost.

She cried out: "Here, Smith or Devine or whatever your hateful name may be, calm yourself. Hold your

wits about you, man, and let us consider quickly what we should do. If Lucy has fled every minute lost will make it harder to trace her." Her tongue, her lips, refused to utter the awful thought that passed through her mind—every minute lost invites a tragedy.

"Madman, listen to me. There are stopping at these hotels near by" (giving him the cards) "my cousins, Helen and Edward, and Jacob Pepper—send for them at once and let us have the assistance of some cooler heads."

Devine winced at the mention of these names, but hurried away to give the orders.

Not a word more was spoken until the speedy arrival of our friends.

The circumstances were hurriedly explained. All was confusion and excitement. Two hours had gone by since Lucy had heard the fatal story. There could no longer be a doubt but in some manner she had gone astray.

XIII.

WHAT a night of horror was passed by our friends. The men could relieve their minds by tramping the streets and alleys of the city; but for Alice and Helen, there was nothing to do but wait around the hotel, and count the weary hours as they dragged along. In the early morning they all came together again, worn out with fatigue and anxiety. A private detective was called in and took the case in hand. The chief, Mr. Hunter, was a very mysterious man and after hearing the particulars gave them in a half whisper his opinion. He was clear the young lady had disappeared, and as she was running away from her friends, of course she would take the trains or boats as the most speedy means of escape.

The first thing to be done was to pay him in advance a sum of money for expenses, for, as he remarked, no matter what you want to do in this world the very first thing necessary is the hard cash.

The money being paid over, Mr. Hunter looked very pleasant and happy, and began to enjoy himself.

"I do not understand," said Alice, "why you think she would hurry away by train or boat. She does not know a single person at a distance to whom she could go."

“Well, if it comes to that,” whispered Mr. Hunter, “why does she go away at all? Simply to get away from her friends—that being the case she will naturally take the route that will take her the farthest in the shortest time.”

“You are mistaken,” persisted Alice, “in thinking she wants to get away from her friends. It is only from her husband she is anxious to escape. This fatal wound was inflicted by him alone.”

At these words Devine groaned and turned his face to the wall.

“Where then do you think she would go?” inquired Mr. Hunter.

“I think,” replied Alice, “she would go straight home to father and me.”

Mr. Hunter could not refrain a quiet smile at such innocence as this.

“Trust me, my dear Miss Stoner, you are quite at fault. No one ever heard of a young lady fleeing to her home. In the very nature of the case the thing is impossible. No, no, you leave it to me and my men. We will find her alive or dead.”

His speech gave a great shock to the whole party, who now went out in silence, hardly knowing where to go or what to do.

It was settled that Alice should go home at once to warn her father, and be prepared to receive Lucy when she was found. The others would still remain around Portland, waiting for news.

“I think,” said Helen, “that Edward must go home with Alice. She cannot go alone. I dread when this

news reaches my uncle. We will have new trouble there.”

* * * * *

Overwhelmed with the awful news, Lucy, half-unconscious, retained but one thought—to escape home. Instinct turned her face in the right direction. The river and railroad made great bends along the valley, but straight across country by the country road it was scarcely forty miles to Oakland. She knew but little of cars or boats—naturally she went for this cross-road. Faint and trembling she wandered along the scarcely broken track, now in darkness among the dense woods, and again her way lighted by a brilliant moon as she came out into the open country. Good health and a strong constitution sustained her at first, but soon fatigue of body and agony of mind began to tell. Each step was slower and more painful until at last she sank exhausted by the roadside.

A market-wagon, drawn by an old white mule, came creaking along. The driver, a boy dressed chiefly in rags, was whistling loudly, partly for company and partly to keep his courage up along this lonely way. At sight of Lucy the mule stopped, put forward his great ears and stared astonished. No wild beast out of the woods could have been a stranger sight to that ancient animal than a young lady, arrayed in all the fashion of the times.

The lad at first was frightened, but a glimpse of Lucy's sweet face reassured him. His tattered garments—scarcely sufficient to clothe his nakedness—were

quite sufficient to cover a manly spirit and a tender heart. He saw at once her sad, forlorn condition. Hard times and rough usage make children very precocious, and what would have been scarcely noticed by a child more tenderly reared was all taken at a glance by this lad who had known nothing but exposure and hardship in all his short life.

“Lady, will you ride with me?” kindly asked this rough little specimen of frontier life.

Fortunate it was for poor Lucy the boy was small and poor looking, with team to match his poor estate. If she had been addressed by an older person, or invited to ride in a comfortable carriage, her only thought would have been to hurry away and hide, but the boy spoke so entreatingly and with such an honest look—and she was so far gone.

She thanked him, climbed in and sat down on the straw beside him.

The mule jogged on—the wagon uttered louder complaints at the increased load. Lucy was perfectly silent. The lad became restive. He examined his passenger with many looks askance. Such a lovely face—so beautiful—so sad—what perfumes floated about—what did it mean?—was it a lady lost in the woods?—was it an angel?—look at her fair hair, her sweet mouth.

At length the inquisitive boy nature asserted itself—he opened the conversation.

“Lady, your dress is all torn and muddy—are you lost?”

“Lost! lost!” repeated Lucy—“no home—no name”

—then turning to him suddenly, “Boy, have you a name? Your own real name?”

He was considerable taken aback by her tone and language, but plucked up courage to answer.

“My name is Bubling McCarter, miss. I have a sister—her name is Sweetbriar—my mother’s name is—just Mammy.”

“Has your father a name?”

“No, miss—my father is gone dead; always dead.”

“Well, boy, bear this in mind, whatever happens—I am Farmer Stoner’s daughter. I must go home. Do you know where he lives?”

“Indeed I do, ma’am, it’s a mortal long way from here, but don’t you take on, miss. To-night you’ll stop with us in our cabin; it’s not far now. To-morrow I’ll take you home in the wagon. Nanny can do it in a day. It’s not above twenty miles or so.”

“I am Farmer Stoner’s daughter. I must go home. I have no name, but Alice will know me. Father will never know me—but Alice knows me.”

As she kept on repeating this in a sad, mournful voice, the poor lad soon became thoroughly frightened. He tried to hurry the mule along, but Nanny objected. He tried to change her thoughts by giving an account of his trip to market with all the details of what he had sold and what goods brought back. While he talked, she listened, but as soon as he was quiet she returned to the same oft repeated words.

At last tired nature asserted her claims. Lucy sank down in th straw, exhausted. The poor boy cried

heartily as he looked in her sad face, and heard her heavy sobs and sighs.

Late at night they came in sight of a little log cabin with a few shabby outbuildings. It was in a romantic spot on the edge of the forest—the great trees towering aloft; and a clear stream of water flowing swiftly by on one side.

A roughly dressed woman was looking anxiously out.

“Why, Bubling,” she cried, as soon as he came within hearing. “Wherever have you been so long and me scared out of my life for fear something had happened to you.”

“Mammy,” said the boy, holding up a finger of caution, “I had to drive slow, I have a precious burden in the wagon.”

Here Lucy, wakened by the voices, raised up and looked over the side of the wagon in a dazed, frightened manner.

She began again. “I’m Farmer Stoner’s daughter—I must go home.”

“Merciful heavens!” cried the woman, startled, “is this a crazy girl you’ve brought home with you?”

“Mother,” said the boy sternly; “it’s a sick lady I found fainting by the way. I’ve brought her home for the night. She says she’s Mr. Stoner’s daughter—the rich farmer by Oakland. You must take care of her ’till we see what to do.”

The good woman was by no means pleased with this new burden thrust upon them, and blamed her son for bringing strangers to their poor home.

“Hush, mammy; would you have me drive past a sick

woman and leave her to die by the road? Is that the way you want your boy to act?"

"Well, I 'spose it can't be helped, but they're rich enough to pay us for all we do."

"I think, mother, we don't need pay to save this poor lady's life, for she surely would be dead before morning if left exposed there."

Lucy was half carried into the hut and put tenderly to bed, but could not be induced to touch any of the little supper the woman prepared for her.

Whenever roused up she murmured, "I must get home—I must get home."

"Poor lady," said the woman; "I'm afraid she'll shortly reach her home in the other world."

"Give me something to eat, mammy. I must be off soon's old Nanny's done her supper. If I ride all night I might reach Mr. Stoner's by to-morrow forenoon, and they could have some one here by to-morrow evening. We must do all we can to try to save her."

"Bless the boy," cried his mother, "do you think Nanny can travel day and night, and her twenty years old. She must have rest and so must you. Get to bed—I'll watch by the poor lady to-night. You can start early in the morning and do your best to bring help before it is too late. Go give the poor mule a double feed, for she'll have a long journey before her, and I fear but bad news she'll carry."

"Mammy, if you talk so I won't be able to get a bit of sleep to-night."

"Never fear, son. It's one of the blessings of youth that neither trouble nor anxiety drives sleep away.

While the old, by sleepless nights of worry, are cutting short their lives, the young, by sound rest, are adding to their days. It's always a miracle to myself that I'm still alive, when I think what a stretch of trouble I've waded through. As for this poor lady, I've had too much experience not to fear her days are numbered. She must have come through some severe sickness—she is not fit to be out of bed. All we can do is to get word to her friends as quick as we are able."

The poor lad was greatly cast down by his mother's talk. He had felt an anxious concern for Lucy from the first moment he found her. It was dreadful to think of the death of such a beautiful lady.

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In the morning, Lucy appeared to be rested and stronger. She ate a little breakfast, but would make no reply to any questions or suggestions. The woman told her how Bubling, as soon as the mule was done eating, was going to ride with all speed to her father's house for assistance. Meantime, she must remain in the cabin, and if she had any regard for her life would rest quiet in bed.

It is doubtful whether Lucy understood what the woman was saying. As soon as she had finished a slight breakfast she put on her hat and prepared to resume her journey. All the good woman and her son could say or do would not restrain her. It was plain nothing short of force would keep her there any longer. She never asked the way or offered her kind entertainers any pay, or thanks, or even bid them good-by, but as

soon as she could shake them off passed out of the gate and walked wearily down the road.

The woman sat down on the doorstep and rocked herself to and fro, moaning and crying. "Whatever shall we do. The poor thing can never walk a mile—she'll fall dead on the road. Oh why, why, Bubling, did you ever bring her here to die on our hands? We'll get the blame of it." Sweetbriar joined her tears to her mother's, and Bubling would have cried, too, had he not been too badly frightened. Meantime Lucy had passed through the woods and out of sight.

"Mother, quick, get ready a basket with the best you have to eat," Bubling said suddenly—he had decided what must be done. "I will hitch old Nan in the wagon and put plenty of straw in the bottom; give me some pillows, too—by night we can reach Mr. Stoner's."

"You're right, my son, you know the road—you can't miss it—but dear me, I fear you'll never get her home alive."

Bubling, in despair, slung his old hat at his mother by way of rebuke, and hurried off to get ready for his long journey.

"I can't be back before to-morrow night," he cried as he bid his mother a hasty good-by.

"I know it, my son—do the best you can for the poor lady, and remember please don't refuse pay if they offer it. We are too poor to do all this service for nothing."

Bubling shook his head at this speech, and applying the lash vigorously to the old mule was quickly out of sight.

He soon overtook Lucy, dragging herself slowly along.

She made no objection and asked no questions when invited to ride. Apparently she recognized Bubling, and was willing again to trust herself to his care.

He made a comfortable bed for her with straw and pillows and laid her down tenderly on the bottom of the wagon.

She soon fell off into a kind of stupor, and after that made no reply to Bubling's oft-repeated encouraging remarks, nor paid any farther attention to anything that occurred. Every time they came to a spring or little stream, Bubling (as he had been instructed by his mother) filled the tin cup with clear water and offered Lucy a drink. For the first few hours she never refused to wet her lips, but during the afternoon he was not able to rouse her even to take a sup of water. But what frightened poor Bubling worse was that she would eat nothing all day. To go without eating a whole day was quite beyond his experience, and portended a speedy death. He became greatly distressed and began to think it would be as his mother had prophesied. The poor lady would never reach home alive.

At each of the few houses he passed he tried to procure some assistance or advice, but the men were off in the distant fields, and the women appeared both weak and foolish. There was nothing to do but to push on. It was mile after mile, hour after hour of the weary road.

At last the poor old mule showed signs of giving out. To ease the load, Bubling got out of the wagon and walked alongside, carefully selecting the smoothest part of the road. Dusk was now coming on. He had no idea

as to where he was, or how much farther he had to go. Nanny showed a great desire to lie down in the road. If she got down once he knew he would never be able to get her up again. She moved slower and slower—she stood still. Bubling passed around to the rear of the wagon and looked at the unconscious form of Lucy. The dim light showed him a pale, sad face. Was she dead? He dared not touch her. He called her at first softly, and then louder and louder. There was no response. Poor lad, he never recovered from the horror of that day. He was heartbroken with pity for that sweet lady—the loveliest being he had ever seen in his short life. He was overcome with terror of what would happen to himself and his mother for their share in this dreadful business.

“Come, Nan,” he said, “there’s no use standing crying here. We must get on.” Thus encouraged, the exhausted animal made another attempt and another short distance was made, and so by rests and painful efforts a few more miles were gained.

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Late at night, after all the others were in bed at the Oakland farm, old Charity sat on the front steps peacefully smoking her pipe. She noticed a boy, sobbing and footsore, leading along a poor old done-out mule, scarcely able to drag after him the loaded wagon which appeared all too heavy for his exhausted strength.

Seeing Charity, the boy stopped.

“Can you tell me how far it is to the town of Oakland?”

“If you look ahead of you, boy, you’ll see the lights.”

"I don't see nothing," said the boy, dropping on the bank beside the road. Then, rousing himself, "Can you tell me where Mr. Stoner lives?"

"Why, bless us and save us, what does the boy want with Mr. Stoner at this hour of night?"

"'Cos I had his daughter Lucy in my wagon a-tryin' to get her home," and the poor little frightened and fainting traveler threw himself on the grass with sobs and cries of anguish.

CHAPTER XIV.

It did not take many moments to rouse the house, and have Lucy carried in and tenderly placed in her own bed. Having accomplished this, Charity put all the excited people out of the room, too jealous to allow any of them to come near her lost and found darling. But the farmer's people, thinking Lucy little better than dead, dispatched a messenger in haste to the Widow Pepper's place, as it was still called. Mrs. Pinch, the housekeeper, was soon aroused and heard the dreadful news. She did not hesitate a moment as to what was to be done. If there was any pressing emergency, her mistress was the proper person to direct.

Mrs. Stoner was called from the room quietly, on the plea that some one was sick. She scarcely waited to hear the particulars, and while the farmer was quietly sleeping, his new wife was being whirled behind a fast horse to the aid of his daughter.

Mrs. Stoner understood exactly the feelings of Charity, and expected some trouble with her; but Charity was too thoroughly frightened to make the slightest opposition to anything Mrs. Stoner proposed. One look at Lucy lying unconscious was enough for the old lady.

"Charity," she said, in a hurried whisper, "this is

no case for us to be fooling over. You watch here by the bed while I drive in haste for Doctor Little."

"*Send some one*; no, indeed; they might not find him, or he might prefer his bed. I must go myself."

"Now, Bill," exclaimed Mrs. Stoner, seating herself in the buggy, "straight to Dr. Little's office. Put him right into a gallop."

"No, ma'm—if I was to put this colt out of a trot, at night, too, he'd get right away from me and dash the whole of us to bits."

"Coward, give me the lines," Mrs. Stoner said angrily, snatching them out of his hands; and Bill received a lesson in driving a young horse by moonlight that made him shudder every time he told the tale.

The doctor's office was soon reached, and the impatient woman pounding on the door, but all her frantic knocks brought no response.

After considerable delay, a window was cautiously raised in the adjoining house and a head stuck out.

"There's no use jamming the house down," said a voice from the darkness. "The doctor don't sleep in his office at night."

"Why didn't you say so before?" shouted the excited lady.

"If you'd read the notice on the slate you might have saved both your time and temper," and the window went down with a bang.

"Notice on the slate! Well, of all the stupid things! How are people to read a notice on the slate without their glasses? Here, Bill, can you read this notice?"

"Indeed, no, missis. I'm purty good on figgers; but no a one to read print."

All that Bill could make out was 32 and then a 4.

"All right," said Mrs. Stoner, "jump in; it's No. 32 Fourth Street."

The little doctor was quickly at the door in a very limited dress, covered by an immense red dressing wrapper reaching to his heels.

How it was managed, he never rightly understood; but the first thing he knew he was settled beside Mrs. Stoner, who was driving at breakneck speed. It was all the doctor could do to hold himself tight in his seat, and as they rushed ahead his long wrapper went streaming out behind. Bill was ordered to get up back, but, as he remarked, he had no money saved up for a decent funeral, he preferred walking.

"Now," said Mrs. Stoner, when the colt had settled down to a rapid, even trot, "I'd no time to stand parleying at the door. Now I'll explain matters and the reason of this urgent haste."

"Well," replied the indignant doctor, "you might at least have waited until I got some decent clothes on my back."

"Tut, tut," said the old lady, "you've enough clothes about you for two men of your size."

But the little doctor was by no means pleased at his treatment; besides he had a very vivid recollection of Mrs. Stoner's scant fee. It was no joke to be rushed out of bed and down the road by a mad woman in the middle of the night.

"Now stop your grumbling, doctor, and listen to me. Lucy has returned—brought back by a boy in a wagon. Charity says she's dead. I don't, I won't believe it. It

would kill her father to lose that girl. You must save her. You're a smart man, I know—must be a good doctor. Take the job—lay yourself down to the work—bring her out sound—I'll promise—draw a check for bill—don't care what it is——”

“But suppose she should die, what would you say to me and my bill then? I've heard your opinion before of professional men.”

“But, doctor—dear doctor—don't suppose anything bad. Help us—save her—no money or gratitude will ever pay our debt to you. She is a splendid, noble girl. She must not die so young.”

“She's had a great shock,” said the doctor. “It's a serious matter. I was afraid that story would come on her too suddenly.”

“A shock. I never heard of such a disease as that. It can't be very bad. Surely you're able to cure such a thing as that.”

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Mrs. Stoner went on talking, but the doctor was silent. He was considering gravely what promised to be a serious case. The responsibility of such sickness was always very trying to him. They soon arrived at the farmer's door, and the doctor, thanking his stars that night would hide somewhat his scanty dress, followed the two women into the room where Lucy lay, still entirely unconscious.

Mrs. Stoner and Charity, with loud whispers and tears, discussed the situation, while the entry outside was filled with anxious, excited servants and farm hands.

After a few minutes' examination, the doctor left the

room quietly and proceeded down-stairs to the great parlor. The whisperings and scarcely suppressed ill feelings of the two women and the noise of the other people annoyed him exceedingly.

"What is it?" whispered Mrs. Stoner in alarm. "She cannot be dead."

"Madam," replied the doctor, "she is just the same as dead, if she is to be nursed in this disorderly house and with all this noise and confusion. If it is possible for her to be placed under the care of experienced nurses and have perfect quiet, there may be one chance in a hundred for her life."

"Well, I'm sure," said Mrs. Stoner, greatly offended.

"Well, I'll be——" said Charity.

"In that case," said the doctor, "I'll bid you good night, or morning rather," and he drew his huge wrapper around him with all the dignity he could command.

The two women looked as if they would have cheerfully paid something handsome for the chance of fighting it out with him, but they were both too badly scared to make any opposition.

"Have it your own way," exclaimed Mrs. Stoner, completely subdued, perhaps for the first time in her life, "and what then, doctor?"

"Then," replied the doctor, "you may trust in God, for I fear human means will be of very little help. Now order the wagon. I must hurry away to get some medicine and some decent clothes. Will send back a nurse by the wagon. Remember, put her in entire charge."

The doctor drove off, leaving little better than an armed truce behind him.

"Well, I never thought to be so put down by a little man like that," remarked Mrs. Stoner.

"And I," Charity said, "never thought to live to hear my nursing wasn't good enough for one of my own darlings."

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Mr. Stoner sat in his great chair on the side porch, his head and heart bowed down with grief. What was all the world beside to him if he lost his Lucy? There was nothing left for him to do but pray and wait. It might be the good Lord would spare him from drinking this bitter cup; but if not, if it was ordered he must drain its dregs, he could look for support only to the One able to grant help in time of trouble.

Presently he noticed a strange boy crying silently and bitterly on a bench in the yard. The farmer was not one to permit his own distress to subdue his ready sympathy for any one in trouble. He motioned to the lad to come over to him.

"What is your name, my son?" he inquired. "What can I do to help you? You are a stranger, and I see you are heartbroken about something. I know or think the griefs of childhood are very light compared to ours, but I suppose their burdens are just as heavy sometimes, considering the strength given to bear them. Come, tell me all about it, my boy. Perhaps I can be of some use to you. I will help you if I can, you may be sure. The kindly voice and offers of help only made his grief break out afresh, and it was long before he could tell

his pitiful tale. But urged by the farmer, he dried his eyes, and amid broken sobs, told all his troubles.

“My name, sir, is Bubling McCarter. I live far from here with my mother and my sister Sweetbriar. My mother raises chickens and eggs, and works a little farm. My father is dead—we are very poor. Our living depends on our mule Nanny. She hauls the things to market in Portland. Now she is done up. She can’t even stand up. She was a fine mule. She could trot sometimes—if she had a mind to. I’ve seen her gallop. Now what will we do? If we can’t send our chickens and eggs to market we must starve.” Here poor Bubling’s feelings were too many for him, and he had to give way again to weeping.

Mr. Stoner, in the excitement of the moment, had heard nothing more of the means of Lucy’s return than that she had been brought back by a boy in a wagon. At first he did not connect Bubling at all with the return, but now understood who the boy was. Immediately he was all attention and interest.

“Don’t cry, my boy. Go on with your story. Tell me all about it. I’m sure I can help you. Where did you find Lucy? I want to know all the particulars.”

Thus encouraged, Bubling dried his tears and proceeded with his sad tale. By close questioning the anxious father brought out all the particulars of the painful journey.

When the story was finished, the farmer sat thinking it all over. If this brave boy had not rescued his dear child, she would have died from exposure. What could he do to express the feelings of his thankful heart?

He said, "My son, you must know I am Mr. Stone, Lucy's father. I can never thank you enough for what you have done. Fortunately the circumstances are such that money thanks can help you." Then, calling his head man, he said, "Worker, take this lad to the stables, pick out for him the best and most suitable horse—one of the black-hawks about six years old—harness him to the new road wagon. Fill the wagon with all he can safely haul of all kinds of groceries and stores. When you are ready to start come to bid me good-by. The horse and wagon, my son, is a present to you, and this purse is also yours and your sister's. The goods of all kinds are for your mother. When we get out of this deep affliction, you will hear farther from us."

Bubling could not understand the meaning of this language, nor could he realize all the good fortune which befell him until, seated behind a splendid black in the new wagon, he was bidding the farmer good-by. Never were tears of grief turned into more abundant tears of joy.

It was a little relief to the farmer. This good deed for an hour lightened his heavy load of sorrow.

* * * * *

Towards evening Alice arrived, escorted by Cousin Edward. She was deeply affected when she learned from the doctor something of Lucy's condition.

"Is she seriously ill?" inquired Alice, in a trembling voice.

"Well," replied the doctor, "every case of sickness

might be called serious." The doctor was ready to put the best possible face on affairs, fearing greatly the truth told bluntly would be more than Alice could bear.

"Is she dangerously sick?" asked Alice, sinking lower in her chair.

"I was just saying to Mrs.—ah—Pepper that what she needed most was the presence of her sister. I can't say how much we are relieved at your opportune arrival."

"If she needs my care, doctor, let me go to her at once."

"Wait a moment, my dear lady. She is asleep at present. You must not go to her until you have recovered your composure. We count on your assistance, Miss Alice, and to be able to help us you must maintain your composure. Your sister is ill—very ill, but——"

"Doctor, you are concealing something from me," gasped Alice. "She is—is——"

"No, indeed," exclaimed the doctor in a most encouraging manner. "If you can only bear up and help us all may yet be well. But you must understand your sister is very sick—in fact so low she may not recognize you at first. Are you prepared for that?"

"Doctor, let me go to her at once."

"She has been lying in a kind of stupor. I think she may be roused up when she sees you. Come, Mrs.—ah—with us. We will try if Lucy will notice her sister."

It was with great hesitation the doctor supported the trembling, fainting girl into the sick-room.

"Let Miss Alice sit by her sister's side. Draw the

curtains, nurse, please. Let us have the full evening light. Take her hand, dear lady. Speak to her in a clear, distinct voice. You may be able to rouse her."

But it was beyond Alice's power to utter a word. She struggled and gasped, and appeared about to fall over.

"You must control yourself," said the doctor, in a firm, quiet voice. "All depends now on you."

Then there rang through the room an unearthly, thrilling cry of anguish and despair.

"Lucy! Lucy!"

It startled every one and seemed to penetrate the dull ear of the dying girl.

"Oh, my dear sister, speak to me," cried Alice.

A faint tremor of the lips—the eyes opened—a sweet smile of recognition spread over the sad face.

"Lucy," said Alice, in a voice trembling with emotion, "it was all a mistake. Everything is right. Your husband is a noble young man. He loves you deeply. You must live for him and for us. You must not leave us now. Lucy, sister, do you hear me?"

"Yes, dearest," replied a faint, low voice. "I've had a frightful dream—it's over now—love for papa—he must not blame John—he loved me dearly. I was very happy. You must love him for my sake." Then a voice so sweet, so low, so faint, it seemed to come from beyond this mortal life, "Love him for me."

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Close the door softly. Come away. Let us draw a veil over the anguish of this stricken family; nor mock their grief with idle words of consolation.

XV.

IN a few short months affairs began to settle down again with our friends. The farmer lived with his new wife where everything possible was done to contribute to his comfort and happiness. He felt greatly the loss of his dear daughter, but the change in his home and the devotion of the whole family helped to restore his mind.

The heaviest affliction fell upon poor Alice. She and Helen kept house together at the farm. Edward lived with them. The farmer would not hear to either of his newly-found relations leaving his house. The three made a very comfortable little household, assisted by the daily visits of Mr. Pepper.

Alice mourned for her sister in secret, but kept up a cheerful countenance before the others. She felt it her duty to make a happy home for her cousins, and as neither of them had even seen Lucy she could not expect them to feel her loss so deeply.

Mr. Pepper was always made welcome, and indeed was in and out of the house like one of the family; but Alice was compelled very soon to make him understand there must be no more thought of marriage between them.

This was a great blow to that young man. "I don't

see," he said, "that we are any more relations than ever."

"All the same," replied Alice, "it is not a subject to be discussed between us. It's settled in my mind, and unless you can bring yourself to consider it in the same way, you must really keep away; and you know, John, how it would pain me to insist on that."

"You could not have the heart to say that, Alice. I've always been coming here. I couldn't live without it."

"I don't want to stop you at all. On the contrary, I want to see you all the time; but I can only stand it on my conditions."

"I never thought you would turn against your old friend in that manner."

"I can't bear to see you, John, with such thoughts running in your mind."

"I know, Alice, it's too soon after our great affliction to think of such a thing. Say no more about it—we'll just leave it now."

"No, my best friend, I want it settled now while we're on the subject. I want you for my dear friend always; but this thing must be settled now, and you must never bring the subject up again, even by a look. Come, do you agree?"

"I agree, of course. It's not for me to persecute you, but I must say it's a very unexpected blow."

Mr. Pepper went off in profound depression to consult his counselor and friend, the doctor, on the present unpromising state of affairs.

"Why, dang it all," he cried, "I feel I'm being de-

frauded some way. It was always understood I was to have one of the Stoner girls, and now, it seems, I'm to be left out in the cold. Is there any law against my marrying Alice, doctor?"

"I'm not versed in the law," replied the little man, "but have no doubt in this case the young lady's will makes the law. It don't make any difference whether she's right or wrong, if she insists on having it broken off you have nothing left but to submit, and I know you're man enough to do it gracefully."

"You're very kind, doctor; it's not your tooth that's being wrenched out."

"Please observe, as it is now, you have the pleasure of her society, while if you are obstinate you lose that also."

"But, doctor, it only makes me feel worse every time I see her dear face. It was all right, if mother hadn't put her foot in it; and she was always pushing me up to it. I call it a blamed mean trick."

"You will please bear in mind, Mr. Pepper, you are not sure that your mother's marriage has anything to do with it. At all events, it can't be helped now. Her marriage will add greatly to your mother's happiness for all the remainder of her life. There's no denying that Mr. Stoner is just the one man for her."

"And his daughter," added Mr. Pepper, "is just the one girl for me; and look at all the money I've spent, too, in clothes, and horses, and jimcracks, and by your own advice, doctor. That's the kind of a friend you are."

"Come now, Mr. Pepper, would you like to go back

into—well, to put it plainly—the clodhopper state you were in when you first came to me? Now, you know you wouldn't. It's a curious thing to me how blind you are to your own interest. You have fixed your mind on a certain style or type of woman, and you're not able to think of anything else. Now, what a man desires in his future wife is, in a great measure, a matter of chance. It isn't at all that no other woman than the one selected wouldn't make him equally happy, but only chance, or whatever you may choose to call it, has brought him into contact with this particular person. It's quite probable that by the rule of average there may be about one million of girls now living in the country, any one of whom you would have equally fancied and fallen in love with if you had chanced to be thrown with her in the same manner."

"Blast it and confound it, doctor, I don't believe a word of what you are saying. There never has and never will live in the whole United States two such girls as those."

"Don't be rough, Mr. Pepper. Just listen to reason. Here is a young man of goodly proportions, a fairly solid head, and with undoubted wealth: all combined will give him a leading position in the country, provided he marries and settles down, and takes up all the duties expected of him. If he fails to marry well, he will probably drift off into mischief, and the next thing will be throwing his money away to no good purpose. No, no, Mr. Pepper, I am only stating an imaginary case. Of course you wouldn't be throwing money away; but what were you swearing at me about just now? I

tell you when there is a woman in the case no man can be sure of himself. A worthy object! Why, of course a most worthy object. The young man I have in my mind went to all this trouble and expense, under the impression that a tall girl with dark blue eyes and brown hair was the only kind of female calculated to make him a happy man for life."

"What? *The hair and eyes have nothing to do with it.* If that's the case, how does it happen that just as handsome a girl, only a little shorter, with black hair and sparkling black eyes, has no attraction for him. A girl with city manners, sir, and a city education—as bright as a steel trap and as pretty as a rainbow."

"What? *She wouldn't look at you; she's in love with her cousin.* That's just where you're out. She doesn't care a fig for her cousin. He's too selfish to attract any woman. It's my private and strictly confidential opinion she's deeply in love with you. Now, keep this to yourself, mind; but why worry your life out with a girl who won't have you, when you have a chance, a fair level chance, to win a prettier, brighter girl, who, if you manage your cards right, will be Mrs. John Jacob Pepper inside of one year, and not a man in the state will have a brighter, more lovely wife."

All this was a new revelation to the astonished Mr. Pepper. Of course no man could deny that Helen was a mighty superior girl, and if she was in love with him, too, that was a very important matter. All his life he'd been after girls who wouldn't love him. It certainly would be more satisfactory to find one who really fancied him. The little doctor was a blamed smart man,

and could see through a millstone quicker than most people.

Mr. Pepper turned it all over in his mind for a long time, the doctor quietly reading to give his medicine a chance to have its full effect.

At length the doctor looked up inquiringly.

"Doctor, we're all born different. I suppose we can't help it. For my part, I can't help admiring brown hair and blue eyes."

"But suppose they are not for you, what then? Are you going to spend the remainder of your days crying for the moon?"

"The moon! no, I don't want the moon."

"Well, for what you can't possibly get?"

"I think, doctor, your advice is good. I'll dry my eyes and try to stop crying."

"Don't you think now, Mr. Pepper, as a man of common sense, that black is a finer color than brown?"

"Oh, doctor," replied the young giant, heaving a mighty sigh, "I was brought up on the brown, and it's hard to change all at once."

"Don't mistake me, Mr. Pepper, and take it for granted you're sure of the black. What I said was, you have a level chance and would win if you managed the matter right."

"If it depends on managing girls, I may as well surrender. I've had but poor luck so far."

"True, but all the time you have been working against the current. Suppose the girl loves you in secret, of course she would never admit it until you make the regular approaches and capture her by de-

grees. Don't you try to take the garrison by storm. That's your way, but it won't work in this case."

"How would you set about it?" inquired Mr. Pepper, beginning to feel interested in this new subject.

"Of course, the first thing," replied the doctor, "is to make sure that you want any particular woman, for nothing can be more to the discredit of any man than to pay special and noticeable attention to any woman for mere amusement, or to pass the time. I don't allude to those trifling flirtations where both parties understand there is nothing intended more than passing a pleasant hour. The young are entitled to all the harmless pleasures they can get while their youth lasts. The time will come when the more serious business of life will press for attention."

"But, doctor," interrupted Mr. Pepper, "how are you to make up your mind that you want a certain girl? If the one you've wanted all your life suddenly turns against you and throws you over, it's a course of events calculated to throw a man's mind into confusion. It ain't so easy to change all in a moment."

"Nothing easier," replied the doctor. "Common sense will carry you right through. If the girl you want won't have you, and you can see that for some reason her determination is final—why, that point is settled without giving you any trouble. Now, as to the other matter, if your mind is not entirely made up and you don't feel perfectly certain you would like to marry a particular person, you must give yourself the benefit of the doubt, and look further into all the facts before you commit yourself. In selecting a companion for life

there are many considerations of vital importance that a young man, if he is prudent, will keep in mind. The more complex the affairs of society become, the more difficulties there are in the way of a happy decision. In the olden time, when a young farmer wanted a wife, the most important consideration was that she be strong and healthy; after that would come the points of good temper and good looks, and all the other attributes that go to make up a good wife; or, to put it in other words, no matter how entirely the young wife might satisfy her husband's ideal of a perfect woman, unless she was industrious and able to help him make the joint living by the work of her own diligent hands, they would inevitably lead a life of disagreement, to be followed perhaps by an old age of poverty and distress. This rule will apply to many persons in the ordinary ranks of life. But now, by the increasing wealth of the nation, there are many men in position to marry to whom the working powers, or, as you might call it, the earning capacity of his wife are and ought to be of no consideration whatever. You are one of those happy mortals, and yet a lazy or shiftless woman could never make you permanently happy, because her actions would be so much at variance with your education and habits and your views of what are right and proper."

"But," said Mr. Pepper, "I don't see that you are coming any nearer to answering my question as to how you are to decide that you like any particular woman enough to risk asking her to be your wife."

"Why, yes, if you will but observe I have answered you in so many words. See, now as you are in position

to leave out all considerations of wealth or earning power in your future wife, you can come right down at once to accepting any young lady whose education and views of life—opinions of right and wrong—inclinations and wishes as to occupation and pleasures, are likely to be in accord with your own. If these preliminaries are all right, you may then safely proceed to fall in love.”

“Doctor, I think you are all wrong here. As far as I have had any chance of knowing, I don’t think young ladies have any particular views or opinions on any subjects, and the only inclinations or wishes I have ever noticed was perhaps to get all the fun going.”

“If you go into the matrimonial business on that basis you will find yourself a sadly mistaken man; for without exception every one of them has very decided opinions and desires. As a rule the drift of all that makes up the mind of a woman runs in accord with the customs and traditions of her family.”

“By your account, doctor, one would have to cultivate a knowledge of all the relations and ancestors of a girl before venturing to fall in love. I don’t believe you have any more sentiment than an ox.”

“If you come to love, Mr. Pepper, I’ll admit that’s an altogether different matter, and cannot be regulated by rule, or even by common sense. There is no doubt a subtle and curious attraction which sometimes draws persons together, and this outside any question of expediency or reason. But this love, no matter how ardent, will not of itself enable many couples to lead happy married lives. So much the more reason, then,

that all questions of fitness should be determined before love is permitted to have full sway. When Cupid gets control no other question than love will receive consideration. I know this meddlesome little god is ready to persuade young and inexperienced people that if they will be guided by him perfect bliss will crown their lives; but he was never known to furnish one square meal, and even lovely woman cannot live without her dinner."

"Well, dang it all," cried Mr. Pepper with impatience, "you have so many words I can't make you out. Tell me in plain English, if you were in my place, what would you do?"

"No, no, I can't tell you what to do; you must be your own judge; but I can say what in my opinion would be a suitable wife for a man like you."

"Very well, let's have it right down in two words."

"No, sir, the girl I have in my mind requires more than two words to describe. In the first place, as you are rich, you want a wife who is poor. To lift a young lady at one turn from poverty to affluence is like taking a burden off the soul. All the feelings of affection and regard she might have for you would be greatly increased by the thought that it is by your means every earthly comfort and pleasure is provided."

"I don't agree to that, doctor. I don't see the objection to a fair amount of land or cash—but go on."

"Then, again, as you are large, you should have a wife finely formed and of medium proportion. She will admire you all the more."

"There might be something in that," said Mr. Pepper, reflectively.

"As your hair is light and your eyes blue, you should have a wife with dark hair and black eyes. This is Nature's rule of opposites agreeing."

"Well, I can't say I dislike black hair and eyes, but I strongly prefer the light."

"Then you want a wife who is bright and lively, good-looking and good-tempered."

"Those are all good points, doctor, in a wife or a horse."

"A very important point—as you are now Mr. John Jacob Pepper and were aforetime Jakey—I think it well that your wife should know you only as the young gentleman you now are."

"Doctor, I'm satisfied. I'll trade the brown for the black."

"Or in other words," said the doctor, "you will make every effort to win that charming Miss Helen for a wife. But listen to my advice. Go about it gently, or you'll frighten off the bird before you come within gunshot."

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Mr. Pepper turned over all these sayings in his mind, and with his usual promptness resolved to put the matter in train without delay.

As he drove home past the farm he invited Miss Helen to take a ride with him behind his new pair of grays. She was quite surprised at the invitation, as Mr. Pepper had scarcely noticed her before, being all devotion to

Alice; but she willingly accepted, and they were soon flying up the valley.

"Now," began Mr. Pepper, to lose no time, "you may feel surprised, Miss Helen, that a man of my size and age has never married."

"Oh, no," replied Helen, "I never thought at all on the subject, and if I had would have known the reason."

"What do you suppose now is my idea of the right kind of a woman to suit me for a wife? I imagine you have no notion of my ideal."

"Oh, yes, but I have," said Helen sadly, "and am only too sorry that death and your mother have conspired together against your hopes."

"Let me tell you, Miss Helen, what I want in a wife. In the first place, as everybody knows, I'm rich. I suppose there's no boasting in my saying so. Being, then, rich, my wife must be a poor girl."

"That is a surprising notion, but fortunately it is a want that can be easily supplied. If you come to that, I'm poor enough myself," said Helen, laughing innocently, and not having the least idea of the drift of Mr. Pepper's discourse.

"Yes, Miss Helen, that may be true; and as far as that goes you would suit me exactly."

"But, really, Mr. Pepper, I don't see why you should have such a queer idea."

"I'll tell you, Miss Helen, I would want my wife to love me so much, and perhaps she could feel more affection for me, if at one shot she found a husband who was all devotion, and at the same time supplied all the

comforts and pleasures that wealth could bestow. Don't you think there's something in that?"

"There might be something in it, and it is certainly a very generous feeling on your part to want to share all your wealth in this way with a poor girl."

"And then you see she would understand I took her for herself alone. Just that she pleased me—and suited me—and I loved her."

"But how if she took you for your money only? You might be making a mistake then."

"I'm not afraid. Let her accept me for myself and my money and I'm prepared to convince her by my loving consideration, that of the two things, both may be good, but I am the best. Yes, I'm very sure I'm right here—to fully enjoy my money my wife must have none of her own."

"Then again," continued Mr. Pepper, "I would want a wife not too tall. I wouldn't want to be taken for a pair of giants; not that I'd insist on a small woman, but just medium size and beautifully proportioned."

"Well, I should think that such a man as you would admire more a tall large woman."

"Not at all—another point—as I am light myself, with blue eyes, I naturally admire more a woman with dark hair and black eyes."

"Now you surprise me greatly, Mr. Pepper, for I always supposed your taste ran in an entirely different direction. Indeed I'm sure it did."

"Very well; you see how entirely you are wrong. That's one reason that I am giving you my preferences,

because I felt certain you had incorrect notions about me."

"But, Mr. Pepper, it don't concern me, and it certainly makes no difference to you, what opinion I hold about you."

"Oh, yes, but it does make a great deal of difference to me, I assure you, what you think. As I hope you are to live here always, I want you to think well of me, and to know me as I am. Now, isn't that a proper way to look at it?"

"Yes, perhaps."

"To continue the list of my wife's qualifications, she must be good looking, good tempered—bright and lively, and of a gentle and affectionate disposition."

"Oh! that's all a matter of course, or, what is the same thing, you must think so;" said Helen, laughing, "but haven't we driven far enough? It will be supper time before we can get home."

"Oh! I'll spin you home in short order. I want to take you to the top of the next hill. The view from that point is grand. I want to ask your opinion, Miss Helen, on a matter of great importance, and I have perfect faith in your correct judgment. Don't you think that if a man finds that circumstances have interfered to deprive him of a cherished idea, so that he is made to understand that under no conditions can his desires ever be gratified, that it would be wise to give up such hopes, and not make his life a miserable failure by continuing to grasp after what he knows he can never reach?"

"Really, Mr. Pepper, I could form no opinion on such

a matter, but I'm quite sure we'll be late for supper if we don't turn."

"All right, Miss Helen, you shall have your own way, and if you prefer your supper to a sight of that grand view, back we go."

Mr. Pepper turned his team and dashed towards home at a furious pace.

Helen sat silently considering what could be the meaning of all this talk. She had never thought of him before other than as a fine looking and agreeable giant—in love with Alice, and ready to take any amount of trouble to oblige any one, especially the ladies. He was certainly intelligent, well educated, and thrifty, and by no means ready to go to the dogs as young men sometimes consider necessary when placed in similar circumstances.

When they came in sight of the house, Mr. Pepper drew in his horses and put them on a walk, remarking that it was always necessary to cool them off after such speed before coming to a stop.

"Now, Miss Helen, I want you to remember what I have said. I'm not brute enough to propose marriage to any one so soon after the painful loss we all feel so much, and I'm not going to disturb dear Alice any more by thoughts even that I know she disapproves of. I love her too much. But in the future if I can find such a girl as I have described, she must be mine, if I can make her so. I'm only a plain common-sense fellow, and neither handsome nor bright; but we've all had some heavy experience lately that great brilliancy sometimes leads to great misfortunes. I have some-

thing important to say to you, Miss Helen, but don't think I would even hint at it now, but when the times are ripe I will ask you to hear it."

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"Why, Helen," exclaimed Alice at the table, "what has Mr. John Jacob been saying to you that makes you so grave and silent?"

Helen blushed furiously, and laughingly turned the subject, but that blush was fixed in the mind of Alice, and she was immensely pleased to notice it. What conclusion of the whole matter could be more fitting than that Helen and her dear old friend should be happy together.

XVI.

THE autumn was now far advanced and winter about setting in. The outside farm work was well over, and everything prepared for the long cold spell. It is in the cold season the farmer finds his chief pleasures.

Every day Mr. Stoner rode over to see his daughter and the young folks. His farm was left chiefly in charge of Edward and Jacob, while he himself looked after his wife's business and farms.

Jacob found his business required a great deal of driving about. Helen, urged on all sides, would often join him. Mr. Pepper, not content with passing most of his days in this manner, found his business required him also to spend the evenings at Oakland farm.

His mother was not ignorant of the doings of her son, but was not in position to have much influence over him. She had strong objections to his paying attention to Helen, but only on account of her poverty, and yet she could not say anything against her—being niece to her husband, and as she admitted, a nice girl. But it was plain enough if Jakey kept on going there and Helen remained at the farm, the worst result could be expected. That any young lady, rich or poor, could fail to admire her darling and want to secure him never entered her head.

Helen must be got away or married to her Cousin Edward, or failing in both these plans, she must find Jacob a suitable wife and get him married out of danger. Her idea of a suitable wife was very simple and only included one requisite. She had in her mind exactly the person to satisfy herself.

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The farmer was seated in his great arm chair in dressing-gown and slippers, reading the weekly paper. Mrs. Stoner, near by, was doing her mending. She was an industrious woman, and said she could never spare any time for reading.

A great hickory wood fire sparkled and crackled on the hearth, shedding an agreeable warmth and light through the room, notwithstanding the howling of the winds outside.

Mr. Stoner read by the light of two tallow dips. He had always used candles, and could not change to the new fangled notion of lamps; besides he claimed his candles gave much the best light. His good wife was too wise to go against any of the little prejudices of her husband, although she used a lamp herself and couldn't abide the smell of the candles.

"If it comes to a question of smell," remarked Mr. Stoner, "I think the kerosene oil can hold its own against the world."

"Well, Mr. Stoner, I'll stand the smell of your candles and you must stand the perfume of my oil, and so we'll both be happy; the two of them make a fine light for reading, and I wish Jacob would stay at home

sometimes these long evenings and keep us company. He ought to read up a little what is going on in the world."

"I don't think Jake is much of a reading man, and you must e'en be satisfied to let that point go, since he is a good son and fine young fellow on all other matters."

"It is certainly not right for him to be at Oakland farm all the time, day and night. It don't look well to leave his mother all the time; besides," added Mrs. Stoner, cautiously feeling her way, "he's much safer at home."

Mr. Stoner smiled; the idea of a mother being anxious over that boy! "I don't see what harm can come to him there. He's certainly too big to keep tied to your apron string. The young will seek the company of their fellows."

"Well, my dear man, if I must say it out, the harm is that he is in company of Helen too much. He's too young to think of marrying yet—not twenty-five till next April."

"Hoots, toots," cried the farmer, laughing heartily, "Helen has been engaged to her Cousin Edward this many a year. Don't you be anxious, Mrs. Stoner, she won't worry your innocent lamb."

"It may be as you say, husband, but I think an only son should stay at home sometimes and keep his mother company."

"I suppose he thinks his mother has more acceptable company, madam."

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"I've been thinking, Mr. Stoner, that Julianna Gann

would make a splendid match for Jakey. What do you say to that? She has a pretty penny in her own right, and handsome expectations. Her old aunt can't live long surely."

The farmer indulged in a quiet laugh to himself. Here was the point of all these lamentations.

"We may think it would be a fine match, but I doubt you'll have some trouble to persuade the young gentleman to that opinion."

"I can't see the difficulty," rejoined his wife, "especially if you'll help me. He has a powerful opinion of your judgment, and with all that money he can't be such a fool. She's always been mighty fond of Jakey too, but of course I had to discourage it when—in fact—he was too young to marry."

"Well, madam, I'm not one to interfere much with young people in their love affairs, chiefly because they'd be likely to pay very little attention to any advice on such matters. But you're entitled to my help, good wife, at all times and on all subjects."

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With this backing Mrs. Stoner saw fit to open the question next morning at breakfast.

"Jakey, dear, you're getting a fine man grown for your age," and she looked him over with fond admiration.

"Yes, mother, if six feet two and two hundred and twenty pounds will make a man, you can count me one."

"Your father and I were talking about you last night."

"That's all right, mother. I'll trust either of you to say all the good and leave the bad unthought."

"Your father was saying, Jakey dear, it was time you were looking about you for a suitable wife. Girls of the right kind are so scarce."

"Now, now, Mrs. Stoner, have a care."

"Oh! let her alone, farmer. I've lived with her long enough to understand all her tricks and turns."

"We were thinking, my dear boy, that Julianna Gann is a fine figure of a woman, with a handsome fortune to her back."

Here ensued a tremendous roaring and coughing and choking on the part of Jacob, continued so long he was red in the face with the efforts to get his breath, winding up with shouts of laughter.

"My dear boy," cried his mother, "do be careful how you eat. You'll choke to death if you go on that way."

"It's you choking me, mother, with your fine figure of a woman with her money on her back. I can't swallow them both, and that's the fact, and you can't put that off on Father Stoner, either. I know him better—has more sense. No, my dear mother, that's your own brilliant idea; but you must excuse me, I'm too young to marry yet."

"There, Mr. Stoner, you've been telling on me and prejudicing the boy against the best match in the State, just because the young woman don't happen to be a beauty. Oh, you men, what a senseless set you are."

"No, no," exclaimed Mr. Stoner, laughing. "I told you I would help you, and I will. Come, Jacob, let us

reason the matter together. What's the objection? You know there's no mistake about the cash."

"Now, Mr. Stoner, please stop right there or you'll have me choking again, and there's no telling what bad effects may follow. But, mother, since you want me to marry, I'll think about it. Look around carefully and see if I can find any one to suit. Remember, mother, when you married Mr. Stoner here, you cut me out of the best match that ever was or ever can be. No such dear girl as that can ever be found again; but you never found me making any trouble or objection to your pleasing yourself only, on a matter where you were chiefly concerned. Now did you—always treated the farmer bully, just as if he was my own father."

"Yes, that's so," cried the farmer. "You and I, Jacob, have always been and always will be the best of friends."

"Your hand on that, father," said Jacob, reaching his great paw over the table and giving Mr. Stoner a hearty shake of the hand.

"There, mother, what follows?"

"Very well!" exclaimed the wife and mother, delighted to see the ones dearest to her such good friends, "but it's plain a poor woman has no chance against the pair of you."

"Never mind, dear mother, I'll bring home a wife, who'll please you right up to the hub; but none of your red-headed, freckled, giggling girls for me, and I won't marry for money either. I give you fair notice of that."

"Oh, Jacob, my darling boy, don't talk in that fool-

ish manner about money, and you brought up to always have such a respect for it."

"All the same, mother, I want my wife and my money separate. I won't mix them, and as I have a special engagement this morning I'll have to ask you to excuse me and be off."

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"Well, Mr. Stoner, what do you say to that?"

"Why, my dear wife, I'd pay no attention to what a young man says just for the sake of argument and perhaps to tease you."

"Well, well," said the old lady, sorrowfully; "it's the first time I ever heard my son say he didn't care for money."

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As soon as Mr. Stoner was off to his work, his wife resolved to pay a visit to Oakland farm herself. If it was really so that Helen was engaged to her cousin, everything might come out right in the end, but the sooner they were married the better. She might hurry things up by offering to fit Helen out handsomely. It would be worth all it would cost to get her out of the way; besides, if she was engaged to Edward she had no business to be driving around all the time with Jakey. She would give her a hint on this point.

If Helen was once out of the way she had good hopes that Miss Julianna and her cash might prove the winner at last. All that property should not go to waste if it was in her power to save it for the family. To think of

any sane man setting up good looks against solid wealth.

Mrs. Stoner could not help feeling provoked at the way the world was treating her, and it did not add to her felicity to have her darling drive past with Helen beside him.

"Drat the boy," said Mrs. Stoner, in disgust, "and him big enough and old enough to know better."

Still the game was not over; she would play all her cards to the last and perhaps might come in ahead yet. Oh, the pity of it, that Jakey could not have Alice, a perfect woman, united to a splendid fortune. It appeared to the old lady somehow the world went very crooked.

Well! well! Charity would know all that was going on behind the scenes, and she must try and get into her good graces and get all the news and perhaps some help.

Coming up to the side door, there sat Charity, serenely smoking her pipe.

Mrs. Stoner's aversion to this old witch, as she called her, was so extreme it actually kept her away from the house, but the greatest horror of the old lady was to see a woman smoking. However, if she was to have any help from Charity she must gain her good will, cost what it might.

The contrast between the appearance of the two women was just as great as their dispositions were opposite. The one so jolly and good-natured, the other sour and ill-tempered beyond the power of being pleased.

"Oh, dear, there's Charity," cried Mrs. Stoner in the most cordial manner; "I'm really delighted to see you,

and looking so well and comfortable. Well, how are they all, Charity? One needn't ask if all's going well, for when Charity's in charge things always go well." And so Mrs. Stoner kept on with a flood of talk, giving Charity no time to make answer. She knew by experience, the only way to keep Charity from saying disagreeable things was to give her no chance to say anything.

"Now it does me good to see you, mem, and I'm very glad you've come over," broke in Charity at the first pause.

"Oh, you're so kind to say so."

"Yes, mem, 'twill save me a trip over to your place."

"Just what I'd expect of you, Charity. Let me know everything that's going on."

"Yes, mem, if you'll excuse my politeness, what I wanted to say was, my pension's been going on more'n six months and never a cent paid yet."

"Well there! you shock me; you don't expect your pension when you're back in your old place and getting the same wages."

"That's all right, mem, if you'll excuse my naming it, when I work I draw my wages, and when I have a bond I look for payment."

"Well, I am flustered," said the old lady; and suddenly thinking to save something out of the wreck—"As you don't use the house—I'll put a tenant in it at once."

"Oh, I wouldn't give you so much trouble, mem. The house is mine for life, and I have a good tenant in it who pays regular every month."

"Well, I am flustered," remarked Mrs. Stoner.

"Yes, mem, and perhaps you'll take it kindly if I mention I'll expect interest on all overdue payments on the bond."

"Well, I'm flustered crazy."

"May-be you have a little cash about you now that you'd like to pay on account," continued Charity—inwardly delighted at seeing Mrs. Stoner's dismay.

The old lady was so bewildered that she actually took out her purse and began fumbling over the contents.

"The Lord deliver us," she muttered, aside. "Brass wouldn't pass farther if it was pure gold."

"Don't you trust to the Lord to deliver you from the payment of your just debts," said Charity, overhearing this aside with her sharp ears.

"Well the saints save us," whispered the old lady, aghast.

"Never heard tell of no saints payin' one's debts either—don't believe in 'em no way."

By this time Mrs. Stoner was wrought up to the point of complete surrender—there was nothing left to be done. She began to feel afraid of the old woman. Fair words would not please her, nor sharp words overmatch her. If ever there was a live and wicked old witch in the world here was one now present, conjuring double money out of honest people's pockets, and no power to stand against her.

"Well, I'm sure, Charity, you've always found me ready to do whatever you want. You can have your wages and pension and house rent, all three, in welcome. So now that's settled I suppose you can invite a body

into your nice bright kitchen to have a little comfortable talk."

"Indeed, mem, you're most welcome, but it's not for me to demean a lady by asking her into a kitchen. I'm not so ignorant as that, if some people do call me a witch."

"All right, I'm not particular; you can ask me into the parlor—all the same to me."

"Really now, as you say if you've come to see me it would look strange for me to be asking my company into the parlor. If you want to see the young ladies, please step in the parlor, mem, and wait. They're just gone out riding, but they'll be back in two or three hours."

"I didn't come to see any one in particular, but now I'm here I suppose I can take a seat on the porch."

"Truly, mem, as you think; the place partly belongs to you since the farmer's misfortune; you have a right to sit where you please. You'll find these chairs here very hard, but as you won't come in, just sit down and make yourself comfortable."

"Uncomfortable, you mean," said Mrs. Stoner, seating herself.

"Just as you say, mem. I make it a rule never to conteract any one."

"And a very good rule, too; but as were were talking about the young people, how are they getting along?"

"About the same as the old people, as near as I can judge—they eat three meals a day of the best they can get, and sleep all night in their beds—but you don't fault 'em for that I hope."

"Upon my word! well there! How polite you are. I don't find fault with them for anything. On the contrary, the very reverse. I like them to take their pleasure wherever they can find it."

"Don't you worry yourself over that, mem. They're ekal to finding the pleasure, if there's any going about loose, by road or field. They do a hard day's work seven days a week huntin' for pleasure."

"Good, very good; why, Charity, you're something of a wit."

"No, mem, I never considered myself anything of a witch, although I can see through some old ladies as easy as a needle can pass through a camel's eye! And if you're wantin' to say anything, Widow Pepper, you might as well use it before it gets stale—thanking you for mentioning it."

Thus cornered and brought to bay, Mrs. Stoner proceeded straight to business.

"I think, Charity, we ought to be good friends. We have the same object in view."

"Well, mem, I'll not deny it—the only object I have in view myself is to have my coppers and tins polished and salt down any little crumbs I can save, either in gold or silver. Give me a bright kitchen and no one around talkin' and my just dues paid up punctual, and there's not a more pious woman in the county—as you say."

"Speaking of the young people; I suppose they're pretty thick together, two and two—as the sayin' is."

"Yes, mem, sometimes two and two—and sometimes four in a bunch—as the sayin' is."

"My Jacob now, he's after Miss Helen, I suppose?"

"Yes, mem, you can see him any day a-wearin' out his hosses' shoes a drivin' her 'round."

"And Edward now, he thinks most of Cousin Alice?"

"Yes, mem, as you say; 'times he thinks most of her, and 'times he thinks most of hisself, if not more so."

"Well, Charity, I don't suppose you want any more marriages around here after our late experience?"

"Well, mem, if you'll excuse me, I couldn't be no wuss off if your son was married to both of 'em. I hav' to cook his meals for him just the same, and fussin' 'round with a little bit of cake here, and a little bit of pie there. If he'd marry and settle down decent we'd feed him on his native sourcrout."

"Well, I'm flustered," remarked Mrs. Stoner. It was plain she would have to give up the idea of getting any help from Charity.

As she sat silent a long time, Charity resumed. "No, mem, if the gals would do like me and leave the men alone they might hope to enjoy a pious old age."

"Well, Charity, don't you think if we'd put our heads together we might put a stop to it before it was too late?"

"I don't know, mem; you're purty good a gittin' heads together to make a match; doubt if you'd be as lucky to mar one."

"What would you do now, Charity, if you were in my place? Come, be good-natured for once and help me out."

"What! stop the gals an' men from runnin' after each other. No, mem, old Nick hisself couldn't do it."

It's agin natur', and never can't be done—but I'll say this—the girl that marries your Jacob'll get the prittiest man in the State——”

“Well, it's kind of you to say so.”

“—to put away vittals.”

“I *am* flustered. I might just as well staid at home, Charity, for all the comfort I get out of you, but it will just kill me if Jakey marries out of my wishes—when I've got the girl picked out that would suit me exactly. Oh, dear, it's a sinful world.”

“Well, mem, I'm surprised at you, as considers yourself a smart woman. You come to consult a witch and never offer a cent of money.” Charity, saying this, mumbled and leaned and looked so sly it made Mrs. Stoner's blood run cold. Here was a witch if ever there was such a beast.

“Pay me,” Charity continued, “two gold pieces—two silver dollars—and some small change and I'll tell you two secrets worth knowing.”

Poor Mrs. Stoner was quite upset at such strange motions and mysterious talk. It was evident the old thing knew something after all, and she must get it out of her, even at the cost of precious coin.

“Charity, you're a good woman. I'm sure you'll be glad to help your old friend. Tell me the two secrets, that's a good soul, and I'll pay you two silver dollars and some small change on account of your annuity. I have no gold truly.”

“Well, mem, if you'll look in your puss you'll find the two gold pieces, and thank a witch; and I don't

want you to pay anything on my annuity. My master's able to pay his own debts."

Mrs. Stoner hesitated; she hated to part with her money, but must know the secrets.

"Here," throwing her purse in Charity's lap; "now you have your own way, be fair and honest and earn the money."

"What I say's this," said Charity, grinning in triumph, for there was nothing that made her feel so good as getting the better of Mrs. Stoner. "Them that's together pair together. If you have a better girl, why don't you show her, give her a chance. If that won't work, better send Jakey to the four corners of the earth, and let the farmer pitch Mr. Edward after him. I'd be well rid of the two of them. It's not half the trouble to cook for young gals. They men's allers wantin' this and that, and they gals is allus ready to humor them."

"Well, if that's your secret, Charity, you're just trying to cheat me. You will please hand that purse back again."

Charity carefully emptied the contents of the purse into her handkerchief, and handed the purse over to the disgusted lady.

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On her way home, driving herself as she loved, Mrs. Stoner suddenly jerked up the old horse and fairly screamed aloud with joy. "She is a wise woman after all. It's good advice—a happy thought. First bring Jakey and Julianna more together and try to cut Helen

out. Second, if that fails, Jacob must make a foreign tour of a year or more. Oh, well-spent gold—lucky witch! Come, Dick push along; our work is cut out and we must set about it.”

XVII.

MRS. STONER determined to try the first plan effectually before parting with her darling for a long journey. It seemed to her that Julianna was such an attractive girl, if Jakey would only spend enough of his time in her society, he would never be able to resist her charms. This good old lady was like some other people in the world. Whoever she liked herself, she thought most attractive, and she was not able to see the least good in people who displeased her.

“Jacob, my dear boy,” said his mother, a few mornings later, “I feel very lonesome all by myself the whole day. You men never think of that. You’re off and around seeing people and hearing the news.”

“Well, mother, why don’t you go out visiting yourself or have some company at home?”

“Well, my boy, there’s but few people around here I seem to care for. The old people are so dull, and the young so light and foolish. The only sensible girl about is Julianna, and she’d be only too glad to come over and spend an afternoon; but then you dislike her so much I’m afraid you might do something to offend her. After all, Jacob, you know she’s the most important young lady in this region and is worthy of the most polite treatment.”

"Oh! mother dear, how you talk. I don't dislike her at all—and as for being rude or impolite to her, now, Mrs. Stoner, do you think that is the kind of a son you own? Have her over as often as you please and see if I don't treat her like a princess."

"Yes, I suppose you'd run off and spend the day at Oakland farm, just as if she wasn't good enough company for the best in the land."

"Now, mother, I think that's so unkind of you. I'll do just whatever you say. Indeed, I like her very well. Why, we've been playmates from the beginning."

"But you see she has to leave so early in the afternoon to get home before dark—it's hardly worth while coming unless she can stay for supper. These winter days are so short. I would like to get her up a real good supper. It's said she is the best housekeeper and keeps the best table in the valley, but I think we could show her there's other people understand how to set a good table."

"No one can beat you, mother, when you give your mind to it."

"What do you think would be nice, Jakey? Do you think she'd like a chicken pot-pie with a bottom crust too, and plenty of rich cream gravy?"

"I'm sure she would, mother."

"And say potatoes fried in butter and cream?"

"Good again, Mrs. Stoner."

"And hot waffles and maple syrup?"

"Excellent."

"And broiled venison?"

"Couldn't say fairer."

"And a lot of side dishes, chicken salad and such like light stuff?"

"Keep it up, mother; we'll show her."

"And what would you like for dessert?"

"Oh, bother the dessert; just wind up with a good roast of beef and some ham and eggs to make out the supper."

"Oh, Jacob, what an appetite you have! But I doat on seeing you make a good meal. And then you can drive her home by moonlight. You're not afraid to drive out your pair by moonlight, are you? She is so fond of fine horses, she ought to see that pair."

"Oh, I'll drive her home, mother."

"Now, don't forget to come over in time this afternoon, and just show her Mrs. Stoner has a son to be proud of."

"One must oblige the old mother," thought Jacob, as he drove away on his accustomed morning visit. "I dare say Julia is worth a drive home by moonlight for the sake of a good supper."

The innocent young man hadn't the slightest suspicion that all this was a little private arrangement between his good mother and the fair Miss Gann.

Jacob came home to dinner in the middle of the day, and Mr. Stoner, being admonished, began to dilate on the perfections of the expected guest.

"It's a curious fact," remarked Mr. Stoner, "that of all the land taken up by the original settlers the Ganns' should turn out to be right in the center of the town. The old man made a powerful sight of money on town lots."

"Yes," added Mrs. Stoner, "and hundreds of acres left better than what has been sold; there's no telling what it will be worth in time."

"Her Aunt Jane must be a very rich woman," continued Mr. Stoner. "What a pile of wealth to come all to one young girl; but she's a smart business woman—never known to make a bad investment. No stock or trash for her, just your little first mortgage, well secured."

"Yes," said Mrs. Stoner, "and a very good looking girl after all. You needn't begin to laugh, Jacob; where would you be if all the men were condemned who were not beauties?"

"Oh, come, mother, you know you think I'm a beauty. But I wasn't saying anything against her. Go ahead and sing her praises as much as you like; it don't concern me."

"Well, I don't mean, Jacob, to compare her looks with our girls, but after them where will you find a finer-looking, smarter girl. Her hair is red, to be sure, but she can't help that."

"But, mother, I prefer red; it's my favorite color" (aside to Mr. Stoner) "for a barn roof."

"Oh, Jakey, you have such good taste, and now don't you think she's very good humored?"

"Certainly, mother, always has a smile on her face" (aside)—"a regular giggler."

"And she's always been so fond of you—never gets tired of hearing your praises."

"Well, mother, if it comes to that, I'm fond of her too."

“Oh, Jacob, you’re such a dear boy—and she’s a girl of sound sense too.”

“I believe you. She has sense enough to hang on to every penny she gets hold of; but she’ll throw her money away at last on some fool. There’s always a crowd dangling after her.”

“No, indeed, my son; she’ll never fancy such fellows with the ideal she has in her mind. Now I do hope you’ll be polite to her, Jacob, and make yourself very agreeable. She’s my guest and special favorite, and that much is expected of you. When you want to be kind you’re the dearest boy that ever lived.”

“Oh, I’ll lay myself out to please you; but mind, if Julia misunderstands my attentions, it will all be your fault.”

“Don’t worry yourself,” said the farmer; “she’s well able to take care of herself. If any one imagines because she’s always laughing, she’s any place near a fool just let him try her on business once, and he’ll soon find out his mistake.”

“Oh, there she comes,” cried Mrs. Stoner; “run and help her out, Jakey, and mind your promise.”

Miss Gann drove up in style, and Mr. Pepper helped her from the carriage with a flourish of polite attention.

She dismissed the carriage, and bowing with a gay laugh to Mr. Pepper,

“I understand, sir, I’m invited by your worship to ride home behind your famous pair of grays.”

She touched the young gentleman on the tender point

at once. If there was anything he was proud of it was his fine team.

"What a merry maid it is," said Mr. Pepper, laughing, for indeed it was contagious. To be near Miss Julia no one could refrain from joining in the good humor.

"I suppose now I must call you Mr. Pepper, you've grown such a fine gentleman? Would he be offended, Mrs. Stoner, if I called him Jake, as in the olden time?"

"Any one," said Jacob, "who is always in a good humor, may call me what she pleases. For my part, you will always be just Julia to me, and I'll call you that, I don't care if you marry Solomon in all his glory."

"Just listen to the dear lambs," cried the delighted Mrs. Stoner. "What good friends they always were."

"Yes, but lately she's had such crowds of admirers she's thrown me overboard. I never dare to go near her to put myself against those town-bred fellows."

"No, sir! that excuse won't cover your neglect. You know I'm just a country-bred girl and can't abide one of those snips. I know perfectly well what you've been about, young man, but as the proverb says, it's never too late to mend."

"There, Jacob," said Mrs. Stoner, "she gives you a chance to gain her favor once more."

"Oh, he never lost it, Mrs. Stoner. I think too much of his mother to ever find fault with her darling."

"You dear sweet girl," exclaimed Mrs. Stoner, and the two ladies could not refrain from indulging in some hearty kissing under such joyous circumstances.

Never had Jacob been so polite and complimentary. It warmed his good mother's heart and made Miss Julia laugh till she threatened every button on her dress.

"You must excuse me, indeed," she exclaimed; "but when I get among old friends I can't help it, and as I say, it's better to die laughing than crying."

"Oh, Jacob," whispered his mother, aside, "what a woman to make a man happy for life. If she wasn't worth a dollar she'd be my choice for a daughter." The old lady was so much rejoiced at the auspicious opening of the campaign, she actually believed herself when she said she would accept Miss Julia without a dollar.

"How's your dear aunt?" inquired Mrs. Stoner.

"Worse than ever, poor old thing—perfectly childish—just talks about her money all the time. Sometimes she's sure she'll lose it all and die poor—and then she wears me out with directions how to take care of it. I think it very hard on a poor young girl to have an old woman slip off and dump all that additional load on one. She harped on her money so much this morning I said at last, 'I wish, auntie, you could tie it all up in a bundle and take it with you, for I'm sure I don't want to be bothered with it.'"

"Ecod!" Jacob said; "if it bothers you so much, you can just hand it over to me. I'll take care of it."

"Done," cried Julianna—bursting with laughter—"it's yours if you say so, and all mine thrown into the bargain. I don't want to spend all my time counting up money. It's the plague of my life."

"There, Jakey," exclaimed his mother; "did you

ever have such a handsome offer, so handsomely made?" —the old lady was fairly crying with joy—"that's none of your mock modesty, shilly-shally—but 'just come and take me.'"

"Not so fast, mother; she didn't say a word about herself—it was only come and take my money."

"Well," said the fair Miss Julia—pouting—"you'll hardly be mean enough to take all my property and leave me to shift for myself."

"Jake," said Mr. Stoner—"I think you're fairly cornered."

"No, but, Mr. Stoner—joking aside"—said Julia; "don't you think it very hard for a poor girl to be left in this lonely, forlorn condition—with a lot of idiots hankering around after her money?"

"I know I'd be a double fool to put myself in the power of any of that tribe; but it'll be my fate at last, unless some good, honest man takes pity on me before it is too late. Sooner or later, some worthless man will get the better of me. The circumstances are too powerful for me to stand against."

"Well, Julia," said Jacob, "if you go offering yourself and your money around in that manner the next thing you know you will be lost, or perhaps be sued for breach of promise."

"I ain't offering myself around, Mr. Pepper, and if you want to sue me for breach of promise I dare you to try it."

"Good for you," cried Mr. Stoner; "if he's a man he'll surrender when he's defeated."

It really looked to Mr. Stoner as if the bargain was about struck and Miss Julia had succeeded at last.

"Oh, Jakey knows I must have my fun, and I know I'm safe enough in teasing him. He's tied fast enough, and can't move hand nor foot."

"You are so blamed glib with your offers; the first thing you know I'll take you up. You may not find it quite so interesting as you think, trading off all that property for one man—'twould be a very poor bargain, in my opinion."

"Well now, my good old friend, don't get put out. You know, in all seriousness, I must marry. All that money will never be allowed to live and die an old maid. That being the case, isn't it much more sensible for me to run the risk (and I know it is always a risk) with a man I've known from his youth, than to trust to a stranger. Don't I show my wisdom by getting in out of danger? I, who have no one to look after me, and am frightened to death every night, living alone with a crazy old aunt."

"Poor thing," said Mr. Stoner; "she must marry a man she has always known, and unfortunately she has only one to choose from."

"There, John," said Julia, "I won't tease you any more—don't look so frightened. I wouldn't have made so free only I knew you were gone, body and soul; but now ain't it a pity, Mr. Stoner, he might be the richest man west of the Rockies."

"Very good, Miss Julia—we ride home by moonlight—I'm not so far gone as you think. It takes two to make a bargain, and my girl won't consent. Now, miss,

you're beginning to look frightened. I give you fair notice, I will make you a proposal this very night. Now, then, where does the teasing and joke come in?"

"Oh, Jacob," exclaimed Mrs. Stoner, overcome with joy.

"Come away," said Miss Julia; "I won't talk to him any more." The two ladies went into the house, well satisfied that at last the careless young man had been brought to terms.

"Jacob," said the farmer, shaking him cordially by the hand; "I congratulate you. She'll make you a good wife, and your poor mother will now be ready to live contented."

"Not so fast with your congratulations, Father Stoner. You don't know that she'll accept what I have to propose."

"Oh, yes she will, Jake, she's so fond of you; and it's a fact the poor girl is left very lonely, and no doubt feels dreadfully the want of some one to take care of her."

"I'd be sorry if what I said leads to any misunderstanding, but if so it will be your fault, Mr. Stoner, for you said she was well able to take care of herself."

"I am sent to bid you come to supper," said Miss Julia, breaking in on them, "and I want this chance to say to John I won't drive home with him unless he takes back what he said. Indeed it was only my fun, and I feel safe to think aloud even, before my old friends."

"Rest content," replied Jacob; "ride in peace. I promise to say nothing but what you want me to say."

"No, sir, that makes it worse. I won't go with you, and I did so want that ride."

"Then, Miss Julia, hear me swear by the light of yonder lamp I won't open my mouth during the whole drive."

"Isn't he provoking, Mr. Stoner, ready to take advantage of a poor girl, who thought she was talking with friends, and now this man ready to take advantage of her innocent prattle."

"Come, Miss Julia, I want to please you if I can. I'll ride with you, or walk with you, or talk with you, or keep silent with you, all by the light of the moon. Now, can I say fairer than that, Mr. Stoner?"

"No, indeed. I think Miss Julia may trust you to be always a fair, honest gentleman, anxious to serve her in every way, and I hope no misunderstanding will ever come between two such old friends."

"Here!" cried Mrs. Stoner from the door, "what are all you people plotting about? Come in at once. Your supper is getting cold. Julianna, you're a poor hand to send with a mesage to the men."

"Good Mrs. Stoner, when you send me to two such fascinating men I immediately forget what I went after."

It needs not to say that Mrs. Stoner's supper was everything, and more than she promised, and it was enjoyed to the full with many a laugh and joke.

Miss Julia was a great tease, and could hardly keep from attacking Mr. Pepper, but she was pretty well frightened at what had already been said, and obliged to hold her tongue under some restraint. Not so John

Jacob. He was in great force, and the life of the company. Never had his delighted mother seen him show off with such brilliancy, and even Miss Gann was astonished at the improvement in this friend of her youth.

Mrs. Stoner was very hospitable, and did all she could for the pleasure of the company, but she hurried through supper, as the young people had so far to drive. Poor woman, she could hardly fix her mind on what was going on around her or hear the loud conversation for the words of Jacob that would ring in her ears, "I have a proposal to make to you to-night." At last all her hopes were to be realized, her cup would run over with joy. She could not rest quiet until she had fairly seen them drive off in gay spirits, and then she fell on her good man's neck and wept.

* * * * *

"Now, Jacob," said Miss Julia as soon as they were off, "you know you swore to keep silent, and I hold you to your word."

"How can I be so discourteous as to keep silent when a lady talks to me. If I am to keep silent, Miss Gann, I fear you must deprive yourself of the pleasure of hearing your own sweet voice."

"Well, Mr. Pepper, you know I mean silent on that subject. We may talk about the weather."

"Very good. That's something. Well, Miss Gann, how do you like the weather? Do you think this moon will be good for the crops?"

"Oh, keep quiet, you idiot, if you can't talk sense."

"Well, to come back to sense. You know very well, Julia, I was always gone on the Stoner girls."

"I know it, John. I never had a word to say about it. I never put myself in the scale with them. If I was a man myself I would never look at any other girls if I had a chance with such sweet girls as those; but to be plain, John, now you know they are out of the way. I did think it a little hard you took right up with Helen before you had known her six months. I'm talking as an old friend, and telling you right out in confidence just how I feel about it. You frightened me at first by talking about making me a proposal. I don't want to appear too forward or unladylike, but when one has to look out for oneself it's different, you know. But while we were eating supper I saw I was mistaken. No man can be helped three times to pot pie and twice to every other dish, if he intends to make a proposal the same evening."

"Well, then, Miss Julia, you're doubly mistaken, for I have a proposal to make to you, and one of great importance, but not that."

"Say on, sir. Let us hear this important proposal," replied Miss Julia, her voice trembling with disappointment, for she hoped there was something real for her underneath all this joking.

"Wouldn't you like to drive? They don't pull hard."

"No, thank you, I wouldn't risk it at night with strange horses. They go beautifully; but as you were just saying——"

"Yes, I intended to say something, but am afraid

you might not like it. I wouldn't offend you for the world."

"Well, John, I wouldn't have you offend me for the world. It always seems to me that we three families—all that are left of the original settlers—are somehow very near to each other. If I was in need of help of any kind, I would come straight to you, and never feel I was asking a favor."

"Julia, it gratifies me more than a little to hear you talk that way. There isn't indeed anything you would ask of me that I wouldn't cheerfully do for you without question. Yes, if you will even ask me *that* in earnest I will do it." He took her hand and kissed it tenderly, and held it tightly enclosed in his.

Helen! Helen! This is dangerous work—driving young ladies around by moonlight. Accidents are possible to the most loyal.

"Indeed, John, you bring tears to my eyes and start my poor heart to beating with emotion; but there," withdrawing her hand gently, "you must not tempt me too far. You are bound to Helen. You must be yourself—a man of your word."

"I am bound to her just this far. I have pressed her to marry me, but she positively refuses unless I can get my mother's—not consent—but approval, willingly granted. I don't think she cares much for me, or she would never impose such impossible conditions. I might gain mother's consent by pressure, but approval——"

"That you can never get, John. She thinks too much of money."

"I am afraid that's so. See now what a fix I am in

with such cranky girls. Alice would have accepted me if it had not been for the two old people getting ahead of us, but that is all over now. I know that. I will confess, Julia, what perhaps you may suspect. I can never feel towards another as I always do towards her."

"Well, John, if you will confess to me I will absolve you. If I was a man I would fall in love with that girl from the first tones of her tender voice that struck my ear. It thrills through me like sweet music. Her lovely face is simply heavenly. Every motion is a pose that would enchant an artist."

"It shows, Julia, what a true, honest woman you are when you can say all that and believe it, without envy. It is every word true. I wonder all men are not frantic about her."

"Not at all, they feel she is not for them. She is far away above the common herd."

"Is it because she is all ice?"

"You should know her better than to ask that question. She is affection itself, but enough, let us hear your proposal."

"It's not exactly a proposal. It's like this. I have a friend who is twice as good-looking as I, four times as smart, eight times as well educated, yes, sixteen times the man I am in every way, unless you value a man like an ox, by the pound."

"No, John, I won't allow there can be any better man than you—but go on."

"Well, that's all."

"What! Is that your proposal? You have a friend—a paragon—and that's all."

"I would like you to know him."

"Why?"

"I'm sure you would like him. He's a stranger here, but comes with the best introductions and endorsements."

"What then?"

"There can be no harm in knowing such a man, I suppose."

"No, I suppose not; but I don't like strangers. Oh, John, John, I never thought I would not even be your third choice. You might say in your heart, if in so many years I fail to secure my second, I have a third I'm always sure of, as a last resort I'll take poor Julia."

It was too much. She burst into passionate tears.

Now what is a man to do under such circumstances? Which of us could ride alongside a young woman in tears—by moonlight—and not try to comfort her. Well, John tried to console her. He had to do it. He couldn't help it.

Oh, Helen, Helen, why do you sleep so soundly in your bed while this young truant is driving around by moonlight. Surely harm will come of this.

* * * * *

"There, John, there's nothing like a good cry to soothe a woman's heart. Tell me now who is your friend. I hope it is not that young prig Edward."

"Oh no, no; he will have our Alice. It is thus some men are born favorites of heaven."

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, it's all settled between them."

"Not a bit of it. Don't tell me. That pure angel will never marry that selfish mortal."

"But I tell you it's so."

"And I say nonsense."

"Why, you surprise me. Do you know anything?"

"Yes, I know that will never be a match."

"You astound me. You don't mean to say there's another man?" Mr. Pepper sat bolt upright with the startling thought.

"I'm sorry, John, but it's not you. Your day is past."

"There is no one else. If you mean she will never marry, that's like enough. Yes, it's true. She's made of too fine a clay to mix with mortals. I see what you mean."

"Indeed you don't. She'll be married long before your honor, if you wait for your mother's consent to marry Helen."

"You amaze me. She never saw a man she would even look at besides Edward and myself, and if it's neither of us——"

"And yet her sister eloped with a man. You surprise me, John; how slow you are."

"Julianna Gann! You don't! You can't!"

"John Jacob Pepper! I do."

"That is simply impossible. He went back East a year ago. We have never heard a word from him since that awful time."

"Sharps, my attorney, saw him in Portland last week."

"Well, the skies will fall first."

"Then all I can say is, let them be digging out their foundations and getting ready, for they'll have to come down."

"Say no more. I'm so rattled I can hardly hold these horses. You couldn't have told me anything more astounding."

"You know how she feels about her sister's memory."

"Simply worships it."

"You know the last words that passed the dear girl's lips."

"I've heard."

"To her it's a sacred message from the grave."

* * * * *

Mr. Pepper had assisted Miss Julia from the carriage. They were about bidding good-by.

"But to resume. You haven't mentioned the name of your friend."

"Dr. Little."

"Oh! that little man. I've seen him. I don't want to know him. Since you're auctioning me off in this manner, you might at least have secured a satisfactory purchaser. How much commission are you to get, sir, on the transaction?"

Mr. Pepper would make no reply to that insinuation. He was deeply offended.

"Oh, John, John, that slipped out in anger. I take

it back. I know better. I pray you forgive me. I entreat you forget it. Let us kiss and be friends again."

What man among us could deny such tearful entreaties for pardon? Which one could refuse that kiss of friendship?

Twice—twice we have saved our Helen harmless. We can do no more. "Take care, John, those horses will get away from you. Do get in your wagon and be off." The pair was backing and rearing. Why should they stand shivering in the cold? What were houses and parlors made for? John jumped in, and had some trouble to subdue his restless team.

He cried, "Will you see him, Julia? Say the word."

"John, I think I'll wait."

Mrs. Stoner was waiting up for his return. Poor mother, her anxious heart could have no rest until she knew the result of that evening's ride.

"Well, John, did you make your proposal?"

"Yes, mother, after a fashion."

"Well, my dear boy, tell me quick, of course she accepted."

"No, mother, she said she'd wait."

The poor lady was too bitterly disappointed to make any reply. If there was to be any more waiting, the sooner Jacob was sent off out of harm's way the better.

XVIII.

THERE must be no more hesitation now about parting with her darling. If he continued to drive Helen about, and was with her all the time, while the foolish Julia was making up her mind, the whole game would be lost, a fortune lost, and her dear boy throwing away the one chance of his life.

“Jacob,” she said the next morning at breakfast—it was at meals she had her only chance of holding him in conversation—“I’ve been thinking and planning something I know will please you mightily. Jacob, my son, you’re not paying any attention to what your mother is saying.”

The truth is, Jacob was so used to having his mother talk right along, it wasn’t always necessary to make any special reply, but just make believe to listen, with an occasional nod of attention. This morning he was absorbed in his own thoughts. He couldn’t keep from reviewing all the transactions of the previous night, but in spite of all the astonishment of the news about Alice, and the pleasure of thinking what a nice girl Julia was, and after all a million thrown in could do no harm, and how much better to have a girl come right out square and handsome; still his heart returned to Helen. She was his now. She had virtually accepted him. He was a true man, and bound to use every ex-

ertion to bring his mother round. If that was impossible, and Helen would not change her mind, and Julia would wait, why, then, let the future look to itself. For the present he belonged to Helen, and she to him.

"Jacob, Jacob, how absent-minded you are."

"Say on, mother, your son attends."

"I've been thinking that every young man of property should have a year's travel and see the world before settling down to the hard business of life. What do you think of that, my darling?"

"Say on, good mother. You're a woman of excellent sense."

"I've been thinking you might visit the four corners of the globe,—Europe, Asia, and Africa, and North and South America," continued Mrs. Stoner, vaguely, a little uncertain as to her geography, and noticing she had mentioned five corners.

"Good," cried Jacob, "and you might add the islands of the seas."

"It won't cost you much, my son. I hear you can travel very cheap nowadays."

"Indeed it won't cost me a cent, mother. If you send your darling traveling, you must stand the expense."

"Now, Mr. Stoner, did you ever hear the equal of that—wanting to drive a bargain with his own mother? And dear knows how much money he has himself."

"No, mother, it's your plan, and you must pay the bill; and it won't be so precious cheap, either, for you can't send your son traveling in a mean and niggardly style—a disgrace to the whole family—when I might do you all so much credit."

Mr. Stoner laughed heartily at the discussion. He was great friends with John Jacob, and generally backed him up in all disputes with his mother. He thought Jacob was right. It was the mother's pleasure, and she must pay.

"All right, my son, I agree. Now that's settled, I suppose you can get off next week."

"What!" exclaimed Jacob, "go traveling in the middle of winter! Do you want your son shipwrecked? No, I'll start about the middle of April."

His mother objected to this delay, but as she could urge no special reason for haste, was obliged to give way.

The moment this plan was mentioned this deceitful son formed a little scheme of his own, which he hoped to be able to put in practice. A foreign tour he saw promised inviting possibilities. Why have objections and troubles at home, when all the wide world was open for pleasure and happiness. He was off in a hurry to consider his plan of action. If he could by any means gain Helen's consent, how plain and beautiful all the road lay before him.

Mrs. Stoner was highly pleased. She was afraid he would object to leaving Helen. His ready consent only showed her what she knew already—how selfish all the men were—how their individual pleasures come before everything.

"I got that idea from Charity," she said to Mr. Stoner. "Don't you think it a capital plan?"

"Certainly, travel is an education and experience for the young that will do more to bring them on than

the same amount of time and money spent in any other manner."

"I don't mean that exactly, Mr. Stoner; but just to keep him out of mischief."

"A year's not a long time. How will it be when he comes back?"

"Oh, by that time Julianna will be tired waiting, and he'll have Helen completely out of his head."

"Oh, it's Helen still that gives you so much anxiety. Well, she's a dear girl, and any woman might be proud to have such a daughter."

"Mr. Stoner, you don't understand such matters. My only chance now is to send the boy away out of danger, and if you think Miss Helen and Edward are engaged, you'll find too late your mistake, for it's your own daughter he's after. They're just as thick as bees. I wonder you're so blind."

"Well, my dear, if it would add anything to Alice's pleasure to marry Edward, I could not interfere. I would be sorry for it. It would be a great grief to me; but I cannot cross my child in anything. No, not in the least thing."

"If you feel so, Mr. Stoner, I'm sure it's not for me to make objection. There's no denying Edward's a fine, handsome, industrious young man. I only wish Jakey was half as attentive to his work."

"There's not the same necessity for Jacob's working. You must keep that in mind. There's many ways a rich young man can do his duty better than working for his living, which is already provided. But by no means should they be idle. That means mischief."

"Well, I'll keep my son out of mischief by sending him away out of temptation."

Meantime Mr. Pepper was off on his morning's ride with Helen.

She soon noticed he was unusually quiet and quite abstracted. The fact is he was studying over very carefully the important point—how to get Helen to go off and marry him comfortably, and then proceed on their delightful bridal tour. It would save all the row his mother would be sure to make. She could only reach them by letter, and she was a very poor hand with her pen.

"Miss Helen, do you like quarreling?"

"No, indeed, sir. What a stupid question."

"Well, if you disagreed with a man or woman, what would you do to avoid a dispute?"

"I'd simply go away and leave them."

"It's the only plan. If you disagreed with a man you'd go away *from* him, and if you agreed with him you'd go away *with* him. Is that the idea?"

"That don't follow by any means," replied Helen, laughing. "I might agree with a man perfectly, and yet he might be such a boor I'd be very glad to get away from him."

"You don't consider me a boor, I hope?"

"You shouldn't ask such personal questions."

"Would you go with me, Helen?"

"I think I go with you pretty often, perhaps too often."

"Helen, don't you think you could do me a very great favor?"

"No, Mr. Pepper, I don't think I could. I beg you won't ask it."

"Well, to change the subject, how do you like foreign travel?"

"I never had a chance to try it, but it must be delightful."

"To see the four corners of the earth."

"Yes, sir, the corners and the middle, too."

"Suppose some dear friend would say to you, 'Come with me and let us spend a whole year in travel and see all that's worth seeing on the globe.'"

"It would be charming, but I don't think two ladies could make such a trip alone."

"But your friend need not be a lady. Men can travel and enjoy it, too. Suppose *I* would say in one month we will start, a year later will return. By that time our relatives will all be too glad to see us to find fault with anything we have done. Don't get frightened and begin to tremble. It's no elopement. Just a quiet wedding, say in Portland, in the presence of a few friends. Half an hour will settle the business, and then we're off on our tour and our journey for life. If it strikes you as too sudden, let us drop the subject now. There's plenty of time. I don't want to start for four weeks. It's just this way. I will conceal nothing from you now or ever. You shall know my whole mind. Mother has planned this little trip—a foreign tour of a year. You can guess the reason. I am of age and of full size. It is I who must live with the woman I marry, not my mother. I want something else besides money to make me happy. Yes, dear Helen, I want

you. If you could accept me now, it would fill me with joy, but if you can't decide to-day, I'll wait. There's plenty of time—a whole month. Now, my dear, before you answer, do but consider what a beautiful plan it is, how happy we will be when it is all settled, and especially give full weight to this point. I am asking you to oppose my mother, but only because she is wrong. You know that yourself. You can't deny it. For me to marry a woman just because she is rich—for that is all mother is thinking of—would be wrong now, and might lead to greater wrong in the future."

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There was a long silence, Mr. Pepper waiting confidently for her answer, fully convinced by his own arguments and nothing doubting the result, Helen painfully considering the whole situation. As for Mr. Pepper himself, she had come to like, yes, to love him. Although not polished, she knew his solid worth. But there was his mother, a woman of strong views, and accustomed to having her own way. It was only too certain, if her darling son married contrary to her wishes, her objections would be violent and calculated to make his future wife anything but comfortable. Indeed, considering the influence Mrs. Stoner had with her son, her constant ill-will might be sufficient to destroy his happiness, and even risk a break between man and wife.

"Mr. Pepper, I'll say this much. I can only repeat I can never marry you against your mother's consent—

desire. That I am sure is necessary for our comfort and happiness. When you show me that fairly and honestly won I accept. I will not ask you to wait an hour longer. Without that it would be a dangerous risk, perhaps a fatal mistake. I am convinced it would be wrong for me to allow you to run that risk, even if I was to jeopardize my own future. My answer is wait. Take your trip, and when you return you might have more power to influence your mother."

"Well, at least, dear Helen, you'll admit you love me—just a little."

"No, Mr. Pepper, I'll have no engagement. You shall go away free. Do what you please for a year. When you return, if you are of the same mind and can comply with my condition, I am yours. You may draw what inference you desire from that."

"What a hard-hearted girl is here! She would make a man wait a year on an inference. Too weak a support to bear a whole year's love. Wait!—a hateful word! There's no room for such a word in the language of an active, enterprising people;" and then his mind turned back only a few hours, and he remembered how little it affected him when he heard another say she'd wait.

The preparations for Mr. Pepper's great journey went on apace. All the gentlemen congratulated him on the great pleasure he had in store, and all the ladies thought what a selfish brute to go alone. As for Mr. Pepper, he had but one thought. It made him serious by day and almost sleepless by night. How to bring his mother round. Then, indeed, he would have a grand trip; but the least approach to the subject only

excited his mother's ire, and he was at last bound to admit that nothing short of an earthquake would change her views.

Finding his way blocked in this direction, Mr. Pepper turned the siege again on Helen, and tried by every means to gain her consent to his first plan, which, he argued, was simply perfection. But Helen was firm, being convinced their future happiness could only be assured by obtaining Mrs. Stoner's approval in advance.

At last Mr. Pepper, driven to desperation, boldly declared to Helen he would not leave without her.

"Then," said she, "my course is plain. I must leave without you," and she determined at once to carry out a plan she had been thinking over for a long time.

Before taking any decided steps she explained all the circumstances to Alice.

"It is much better," said Helen, "that we should wait a year longer, than by any precipitate action run the risk of making a breach between Jacob and his mother."

"Dear Helen, I promise my help to any plan you form, but I must say it shocks me to hear you discuss the whole thing as if it was only a matter of business."

"So it is, dear cousin; business of the most vital kind."

"What!" cried Alice, "is marriage only a matter of business? Has love no part in it?"

"Well," replied Helen, laughing, "since you are so sentimental, we'll say business and love."

"Uncle," said Helen, a few days later, "I want your consent to a plan I've been forming."

"Very good, my dear. I know it's my place to give the girls their own way. You have my consent, as a matter of course."

"Uncle, I don't like feeling dependent on you any longer. I want you to let me go down to Portland and get something to do to make my own living."

"Helen! Helen! I'm distressed to hear you talk like that. Why, my dear child, it gives me unbounded pleasure to provide for you just the same as if you were my own daughter. Alice, speak to your cousin. Do you hear what she is saying?"

"Yes, father, I've heard nothing else for a week, and I've made up my mind, as she's such an obstinate girl, it will be best, just to let her have her own way. When she comes back she will be ready to stay with us."

"Well, you astonish me, you two girls."

"Papa, there's another little thing. We couldn't let her go off by herself in that manner. You must let me go down with her to see her established in some way. Perhaps I can frighten her out of it and bring her back with me."

"Oh, my dear child!" cried Mr. Stoner in alarm, "you must not even think of such a thing. You cannot leave your old father, even for a day. Helen, how can you be so cruel—with your disgusting independence—as to break up this happy home and tempt my poor child away? Be a good girl, change your mind, dear, and don't put this great grief on your poor uncle. I'm so

fond of you, too, dear, it would give me great pain to see you go."

"Don't distress yourself, dear papa. You see, Helen is restless, and I need a little change and want to do some shopping in Portland. You must let us go, indeed."

"Well, if it must be—but only for one, or at the most two weeks, and you cannot go alone. You must take Edward with you."

"Oh, papa dear, pray excuse us. We want to be rid of the men and have a little rest. Come round on the side porch, papa. I want to show you this vine," carrying him off. "Let me explain. You see, Jacob is worrying Helen all the time to marry him, but she is positive it would not be right without his mother's consent."

"It shows her good sense, Alice; but Jacob will be off in a few days, and there's no telling how matters will shape themselves by the time he comes back."

"There's where you are mistaken, papa. He now declares flat he will not go a foot unless Helen goes with him. He urges her to marry him at Portland and go off quietly on the grand tour."

"Well, my dear, if she did that, Mrs. Stoner would never forgive her."

"So Helen has resolved to go away herself a day or two before his date. I will go with her, and as soon as we hear Jacob has sailed from New York, I'm sure we can persuade her to come home again, and everything will come out right."

"Well, my dear, I suppose I must give in, but only

on condition Edward goes with you. I can't have you two girls alone in the city."

When Mrs. Stoner heard of this plan of Helen and the reason for it, she praised her conduct greatly, said it showed her pluck and good sense, that she was a dear girl, and she would be glad to do anything in the world to please her. She even regretted circumstances beyond her control prevented her accepting Helen as a daughter.

The preparation being quickly completed, the girls and Edward were ready to start on their trip to Portland. His mother was greatly relieved to see how quietly her darling took the separation from Helen. Indeed, she was disposed to blame him for his heartlessness, and remarked to Mr. Stoner, "See what selfish mortals these men are. Here, Jacob in love with Helen for a year and fairly wild after her, calmly prepares to leave her for a year as if he would see her again the next day."

XIX.

"HELEN, you don't know how delighted I will be when you and John are comfortably settled. He'll make a perfect husband. His first care in life will be to make his wife happy."

"Well, dear Alice, if you think so, it's a pity you are disappointed."

"No, not in the least; but still, I'll admit if matters had shaped themselves differently there's no telling what might have happened."

"The next thing, Alice, you'll be making me jealous."

"No, dear, I surrender him to you, but you must expect me to be always fond of him. I couldn't help it. He's not handsome, but as good as gold."

"I don't agree with you at all, for I think him both handsome and good. I consider him just as handsome as Cousin Edward, and a thousand times better-natured. I wouldn't say a word against Edward, dear, if I thought you had the least idea of accepting him. I'm not blind, Alice, and can easily see how much Edward admires you, as, indeed, what man could help it. No doubt he intends to propose to you in words as he has done all along by his actions; and you treat him so

kindly, love, it deceives him as to your intentions. I feel confident you will never marry him."

"To tell you the truth, Helen, he has already proposed in words more times than one. I didn't mention it to you before, but now I know you have agreed to take John you shall know all my secrets."

"What answer did you make?"

"I told him simply and finally that, as my cousin, he would always be dear to me, but he must never think I would go farther."

"Why does he act as if it was all understood between you?"

"I am afraid he has such a poor opinion of woman-kind he expects to have his own way, in spite of the objections any girl might have to him. He feels his poverty deeply, and is determined to marry a rich woman. I don't think it makes much difference to him whom he takes so she has plenty of money."

"If that's his idea, Alice, why don't he take Miss Gann? She's rich enough, and I'm sure has every quality to make a man happy, except, perhaps, one could hardly call her a beauty."

"Helen, I have a happy thought. Julianna shall marry our cousin. Yes, we will both be martyrs and deny ourselves the honor, that he may have the richest girl in the county."

"You're a genius, Alice. They'll just suit each other. She has good nature and money enough for two; and he has good looks and character enough for both. A splendid match! As for love, I think the poor girl would love any man who would overlook her personal

imperfections; and as for our dear cousin, he loves himself so dearly he don't need the love of a woman to complete his happiness."

"Yes, it's a brilliant idea, and as this is our last night at home, we must set about the scheme at once and rush it through. I sincerely believe we'll be doing good service to both if we can bring about a match."

"I'm afraid, Helen, we'll have hard work to manage Edward. Her appearance will be too much for him."

"But, my dear Alice, look at her purse. Surely that is large enough to hide any number of objections."

"Oh, here comes Mr. Pepper," cried Helen. "We must take him into our little plot and bind him over to help us. Come, Mr. Pepper, and hear our little scheme. Don't you want to provide a good husband for your dear Miss Julia? I know you always admired her purse."

Mr. Pepper looked frightened. These girls were always up to some mischief. Had they heard anything about his moonlight ride. If so, he would never hear the end of it.

"We've heard she's just the same as engaged. How does that strike you?"

"Well, I hadn't heard it," replied Mr. Pepper gravely, trembling in his shoes.

"Look at him; how seriously he takes it," exclaimed Helen. "Now he's lost her, he feels his mistake."

"Oh, I've lost her, have I?" said Mr. Pepper, brightening up, greatly relieved. "You girls tease me so, you'll have me reduced to the size of Dr. Little."

"Just listen to him," cried Alice. "This giant thinks

every man not as large as himself a mere dwarf. Don't you know, sir, many ladies admire small men the most?"

"Alice," exclaimed Helen, pretending to be greatly surprised, "you don't, you can't mean anything, but if you are serious, I'm free to confess he's a dear little man and all brains. For my part I prefer a giant," and she gave John Jacob such a kindly smile it made him laugh every time he thought of it.

"You're a pair of dunces," said Alice, "but I'm not ashamed to own I prefer the giant mind to the giant body."

"But you haven't told me who is to be the happy man to get all the Gann gold."

"Let me whisper it," said Helen. "It's our cousin."

"Hold me, hold me," roared John Jacob, "I'm going to faint."

"Be quiet, sir, we want you to help us. Don't you think, when Edward is so poor it would be a grand thing for him to come into all that money?"

"Why, of course I do," replied John, "but he can't get the money without taking the girl."

"Oh, you cruel man; but will you help us?"

"Help you! Why, I'll do just what you tell me, right or wrong. You shall keep the conscience for both."

"I think, Alice, Mr. Pepper might drive Miss Gann over this evening to make a farewell call on me, and we can start the ball rolling at once."

"All right," said Mr. Pepper, "you can count on having her here this evening."

After that Mr. Pepper and Helen went off for a little walk.

"John, did you notice what Alice said about admiring little men. It would be a good joke and serve her right for abusing my giant to have the doctor here this evening, too. You could suggest to him he ought to pay us a call before we go."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Pepper, "I can easily have him here; but perhaps Alice might not like it."

"Oh, she'll never suspect us. It will appear to her as if he was making a call for politeness' sake."

"Well, I'll attend to it, but I wouldn't for the world have Alice know we planned it."

At supper the two girls thought it better to prepare Edward for the coming visitor.

"Cousin Edward," said Alice, "you must brush up this evening and look your best. We expect company."

"Who, pray, is going to put that infliction on us?"

"None other than the great Miss Julianna Gann, the richest girl in all the region; and all her money in her own right. None of your expectations and troublesome relations, but just clear, without encumbrance."

"I don't suppose she will notice me, whether I am brushed up or not."

"Indeed, but she will; she's a great admirer of handsome men."

"Now, is that fair," cried Edward, "for you two girls to be laughing at a man like that?"

"Come, sir," said Helen, "you won't deny you think yourself a handsome man."

"You may be sure I won't admit I think anything of the kind. Is Miss Gann the one with the red head?"

"Auburn hair, you might call it," said Alice.

"Auburn you might call it, but red it is," replied Edward; "but for my part I prefer girls with red hair. The brighter it is the more beautiful their complexions, and they are always very smart and witty. Indeed, the prettiest and brightest girls I have ever seen were of that type."

"Now listen to him, Alice, but he can't make us believe he don't admire us—he's only trying to make us feel badly. However, he shall see the heiress and judge for himself. Perhaps, if he plays his cards well, he might win her and her fortune; but I can tell you she's very quick and will notice if you try to make fun of her."

"Could any one make fun of a million?" asked Edward, seriously.

"No sensible man, surely," replied Helen, "and we wish you luck on this grand undertaking."

"You're mighty fond of your fun, and it would just serve you right if I declare my independence and leave you both."

"And become Mr. Gann," said Helen.

"But, seriously," said Alice; "she's a splendid catch for you, and you might succeed."

"That from you, Alice?"

"Yes, Cousin Edward. I think she would suit you, and my advice is to do your best to win her."

"Very good, Alice, I'll follow your advice. I'll marry Miss Gann."

"That is, if you can get her."

"Oh, I suppose there's no trouble about that?"

"There might be some trouble. Of course she's had offers by the dozen, and you may as well know she is very sweet on John, and his mother intends to make a match of it."

"Well, thank fortune, it's not a Mormon country; you can't all marry John."

"We don't all want to marry John, only our dear Helen. She shall have him all to herself. Of all the men I have ever met, he is the one I would say is safe to make his wife happy beyond a doubt."

"Take care, Alice; I won't have you in love with my John Jacob."

"I wasn't talking of love, dear. I only said the woman who marries him has her happiness absolutely safe. Alas! alas! I wish I could feel the same about other men."

A shade of sadness passed over Alice's sweet face, which Helen observed, but had no clue to interpret. If Miss Gann had heard that speech it would have been full of meaning to her. It would have meant the mingling of sacred duty—pity and fear—love and bitter dread. What hope—what misgivings—what shrinkings, darkened the life of this tender soul! Her trembling heart, torn by troubles too secret to be whispered—by doubts too heavy to be resolved. Well might she sigh alas! alas! Surrounded by dearest friends, whose supremest joy was to give her pleasure, she lived alone. There was not one to whom she dared hint her pitiful story. No wonder her lonely spirit turned towards Portland.

The result of this little conversation was to make

Edward resolve to make Alice jealous, by paying the most assiduous attentions to Miss Julia, and for the future, let come what might."

* * * * *

As the evening advanced, Mr. Pepper arrived with the fair Julia, and later who should drop in but Doctor Little.

Alice cast a suspicious glance at Helen, but she would not notice it.

The doctor was a man able to make his way in any company. The pink of neatness in his dress, and his manners genial and cordial to a degree.

Miss Julia observed him closely, guessed at his age, and estimated his height. She even took occasion to stand alongside of him and was satisfied to note that he was fully as tall as herself, and she was considered uncommon tall. This young lady, notwithstanding her queer looks and eccentric ways, had a very level head, and always knew very well what she was about, and what she wanted.

Cousin Edward was extremely polite to Miss Gann, but that young lady showed a decided preference for the doctor. She made no secret of her fancy for him, so that none of them could fail to notice it.

The disgust of Edward was highly amusing to the young ladies after all his boasted confidence. He wanted to vex his cousins by gaining the favor of Miss Julia, but that young lady scarcely noticed him, while she was all attention to the little doctor.

But Miss Gann could not secure the exclusive attentions of Dr. Little. He was equally polite and agreeable to the other ladies, and altogether appeared such an immense favorite with all three that John Jacob and Edward both voted him a nuisance.

The more the ladies noticed the feelings of Mr. Pepper and Edward, the more they redoubled their attentions to the doctor.

It was very plain to Miss Julia that both the other ladies were much taken with the doctor. "It's just like them," she thought; "they're never satisfied unless they have every man that's worth having. They don't want to leave any other girl half a chance." She resolved then and there, after weighing and observing and admiring the doctor for two hours, that she would promptly remove temptation out of his way.

The cousins were too pretty and too attractive to be left to work their spells on the stranger. Another evening like that and it would be the same old story.

When the time arrived for Miss Gann to leave, Mr. Pepper was preparing, as a matter of course, to drive her home, but she declared, with a burst of laughter, that she would not have the face to trouble him twice the same night, but as Doctor Little's route lay right past her door, she would ask him the kindness to let her ride with him and she would be so much obliged for the trouble.

The baffled conspirators heard this speech with amazement—the doctor's route being exactly the opposite of Miss Julia's.

The doctor, nothing loath, drove off with the fair

Julianna, to the immense amusement of Alice and the profound disgust of Cousin Edward.

Both ladies expressed their surprise at Edward's allowing the little doctor to carry off the heiress after all his promises, but Cousin Edward was in no very amiable mood, and walked out of the room without a word.

Mr. Pepper bid the young ladies good night in an abstracted manner, and drove off towards home, deeply puzzled. "Affairs are getting dreadfully complicated," said he. "This is getting too much for my brain."—He put the matter to his mare, in confidence, as she jogged along, and appealed to her if she could understand it.

"Here is Helen, willing to marry me because she knows I can never bring mother over.—Here is Julia, declaring with tears one night she will wait for me, and the very next night carries off Alice's prize doctor.—Here is Edward, wants Alice and she won't have him; and ready, in the handsomest manner, to sacrifice himself and make Miss Gann happy, and she won't look at him. Alice declares she loves me as a brother—she won't marry me because, as Julia says, she wants the one man in the world she should shun. And here is Edward and Helen, engaged from their youth up, and now have no notion of carrying out the contract. It's all a muddle, that's a fact. There's only one thing clear in the whole business. I know what I want myself, and I'll stick to Helen until I win."

* * * * *

The doctor's wagon was very small, intended to seat

only one person, and the two were pretty well crowded.

It's a cool night," remarked the doctor.

"Yes; but seasonable."

"Good weather for spring wheat."

"Rather dry; but I'm afraid I crowd you."

"Not at all, Miss Gann, plenty of room."

"Doctor Little, I'm ashamed to have brought you so far out of your way."

"Don't mention it; gives me the greatest pleasure, I assure you."

"You're very obliging."

"It's my trade; must oblige the ladies."

"Is trade good with you?"

"Not very. If I had known it was such a disgustingly healthy country, wouldn't have come near it; but settled now—stick it out."

"Hoping for some kindly epidemic?" Miss Gann gave her first laugh. "Nothing breaks up stiffness like your laugh."

"A good crop of regular chronics pays better," replied the doctor.

"A business you might call good enough for one and not enough for two."

"Just so, Miss Gann, no thought of engagement or marriage on such an income."

"And yet I suppose you have no objection to matrimony, in the abstract?"

"Not in the least; only proper state—duty of every man and woman."

"Well, we all ought to try to do our duty."

"Certainly, matter of conscience with me; must marry soon as see living safe."

"Are you particularly fond of doctoring?"

"Far from it; I do it to earn my living."

"Yet some one must do it."

"Certainly, those do it who must."

"If you had a large estate to manage you'd rather attend to that?"

"Rather!"

"Don't let me crowd you, doctor."

"Thank you, I will sit over a little; this buggy is so narrow."

"It's a beautiful moon."

"Perfectly lovely night."

"But the night-time is very lonely when one lives alone in the country. Sometimes I'm terribly frightened."

"Indeed, I pity you."

* * * * *

"Doctor, do you believe in love at first sight?"

"I do; it's the only kind that's real and lasting. When two persons meet for the first time, if they are adapted by nature as suitable companions for life, instinct calls them at once and love draws them together. It's getting chilly, let me put your shawl around your shoulders."

"Thank you very much, if you will be so kind. Do you know, doctor, I'm a believer in love at sight myself?"

"Of course; it's the only true love. Your cool, cal-

culating, convenient love stands hesitating, shivering on the brink; your love at sight never waits to doubt, but plunges boldly in and strikes out for the blissful shore beyond."

"When it comes to jumping in, I'm afraid I'd be a poor hand. I can't even float."

"Ah! Miss Julia, you have but to stand on the shore beyond and give the sign, and Leander will soon swim the Hellespont to reach you."

"Oh! you're quite poetical."

"Who could help it in such company, and by the light of yon beautiful moon?"

"I do so love moonlight rides when one has good company."

"Oh, Miss Julia, you are so kind to say so."

"I've had a delightful evening, doctor. It's the first time I've met you, but I've heard of you before."

"I hope nothing but good."

"That's the truth; I'm so run down by drinking, smoking, lazy men, I will say frankly it's quite a relief to meet such a man as you."

"It's easy to get rid of such fellows as you speak of. They never trouble a woman after she's married."

"What a blessed relief! Of course I know it's not myself, it's my money, they're after. I suppose I'll be driven to it as a last refuge. Perhaps you've heard of me, doctor?"

"Of course, every one around here knows of the rich Miss Gann."

"Well, now you've met me, shall I ask you bluntly what you think of me?"

"Oh, my dear Miss Julia, permit me to say, I'm delighted—charmed."

"Hair too red?"

"Not for me. I admire auburn hair, of all things, and yours is a lovely shade."

"Freckles?"

"I didn't observe any; but a fine, clear complexion will always tan when exposed to the sun."

"Teeth too large?"

"Not to please a doctor. We know too well that strong teeth are necessary to good health and a sound constitution."

"Laugh too much, I suppose?"

"Oh, my dear young lady, could any one object to good humor. Most rare quality in wife or maiden."

"You're very complimentary, sir, but I like compliments. It's a dish not often served at my table."

"Oh, dear! Doctor, we're nearly home; this delightful ride will soon be over."

"Too soon! too soon!"

"You don't know how frightened and lonesome I am at nights in that great house alone."

"I can feel for you, my dear girl."

"I don't know what would become of me if taken sick in the night."

"You might die before a doctor could reach you. It's really very risky."

"I don't want to die yet, but what can I do? I would not mind the cost of keeping a young doctor in the house, but it might not look well. People might talk."

"It would perhaps cause remark, but you might keep an old doctor. I think, under the circumstances, the public would be willing to allow you that."

"But I don't like an old doctor."

They both indulged in a little laugh here, and heaved a mutual sigh.

"I think, my dear Miss Julia, I could suggest a plan that would overcome all the difficulties."

"Oh, you dear man, if you would only advise and help me, how thankful I would be."

"You might marry the young doctor."

"Oh, you make me blush—I see you're a very ingenious young man in overcoming difficulties."

* * * * *

This space represents a blank in the conversation, filled up by hard thinking.

To him, but one sublime thought: "*To manage your own estate.*"

To her: "*Better secure a good man now and have no more waiting.*"

* * * * *

"But, Doctor, when could this marriage be?"

"To-night; we're not a half a mile from the parson's door. Sweet Julia, why not to-night?" here a little squeeze of the hand comes in.

"Goodness gracious, how you frighten me with your sudden proposal. The good man is in bed hours ago."

"He'll cheerfully get up to oblige us—and earn a fee."

"Mercy, no! you mustn't press one so. How impatient you are."

"All the world's under pressure—nature abhors a vacuum," remarked the doctor, putting his arm around the fair Julia—you see she was in danger of falling out of the buggy—the seat was so very narrow.

"Oh, don't urge me so; I must have time to get ready."

"It would save me a long ride home, sweet love." At this point the doctor ventured a delicate kiss.

"Oh, you dear man, it's hard to resist you. Give me one week and I am yours."

"Impossible! It can't be done! If you are to obey me you may as well commence at once. I grant you one day; but how can I ever put in the weary hours?"

"Well, dear love, we'll compromise, let it be in three days."

We regret to add the remainder of this interesting conversation cannot be given, for the reason it was quite inaudible.

* * * * *

And thus it happened, a few days later, while the young ladies and Cousin Edward were enjoying themselves in Portland, and Jacob had bid his mother an affectionate farewell and was fairly started on his long journey, Doctor Little and Julianna Gann—spinster—transacted a little business, the news of which burst like a bombshell on the astonished country.

* * * * *

Here we would like to end our story and say: these

good people already married, lived long, prosperous and happy lives. If we follow our characters further, we will only get involved in impossible difficulties.

Mrs. Stoner will never consent to her dear boy's throwing away the great chance of his life by marrying a poor girl, and Helen will never marry him without his mother's approval.

Dear Alice will never be able to bring her own mind to yield to the entreaties of young Devine, or even to hint at the subject to her relations. If she did, you may be sure they would rise in arms against her. As there is no one left for Cousin Edward, he must die a bachelor. John Jacob, good honest soul, cease to worry about the women. Go off on your tour, enjoy yourself and be happy.

XX.

THE young people being now all away, the old folks settled down for a quiet, comfortable time.

They were pleased to note the great improvement in Charity of late, which Mr. Stoner attributed to the superior management of his wife. She had succeeded not only in dulling Charity's tongue, as promised, but had actually smoothed the asperity of her temper, and brought her at last to the condition of a good-natured woman. Nothing convinced Mr. Stoner more of the marvelous managing powers of his wife than the wonderful change she had wrought in the unfortunate temper of his old servant.

"It's amazing," said the farmer; "and really, madam, does you the highest credit."

"You don't know all, Mr. Stoner," exclaimed his delighted wife. "We are not only the best of friends, but she has rendered me valuable services by giving me timely information of the doings of the young people, and, as far as possible, keeping them apart. You must excuse me, Mr. Stoner, we all have our little weaknesses and mine is in having my only son make a fine match."

"You mean, of course, a rich match."

"Of course, it's just the same."

“Well, well! my dear, I don’t agree with you, and can’t see how any additional wealth would be of any use to Jacob, or add a fraction to his happiness, but you’re entitled to have your own way, which I have no doubt you will be able to get in this, as in most other matters. A woman who can reform old Charity should be able for anything.”

Charity and Jakey had been the closest friends from his childhood. He had spent most of his time in company of Charity’s girls, and his devotion to them touched the heart of this hard old woman, who had but this one weak spot—her love for these motherless children.

It so happened that Charity was the only person to whom Jacob could confide the whole of his mind. Certain portions were shared by his mother, and some by the young ladies, and even Papa Stoner; but Charity was the only one to whom he opened his whole heart. This confidence was rewarded by many special dishes prepared for him by his old friend. Their long and confidential conferences gave rise to the joke, that he was Charity’s beau and would marry her at last.

Every time Mrs. Stoner bribed Charity by fair words and some very inexpensive present to keep her eye open to thwart the young people, this wicked old woman redoubled her efforts to bring about a marriage between Jacob and Helen, and many happy hours Jacob spent with her while she recounted the perfections of Helen.

The last words Jacob said in private to this ancient friend, before he went off on his tour, were: “Look out for a surprise, whether it takes a week, a month, or a

year, it's all the same. I marry Helen—so to save time you might get your spare room ready, as we intend to live with you.”

This high good humor then was only the treacherous delight Charity felt in anticipating the time when she would see her old enemy discomfited and all her plans put to confusion.

* * * * *

“How is my good friend this morning?” exclaimed Mrs. Stoner, driving up.

“Oh, mem, I’ve had a bad night, cramps and pains in every blessed bone of my body. If it had not been for your blackberry brandy I’d been worse than dead by this time. If you could spare another bottle——”

“You shall have it, Charity, if it’s the last one I had in the world, and here, I’ve brought you another pot of your favorite jam.”

“Oh, you’re too kind, mem, if you will excuse the story, but that jam is so rich you ought to be careful how you give it to old men. I’ve heard of bad effects coming to them from such rich sweets.”

This praise was somewhat suspicious, but Mrs. Stoner resumed:

“We can hardly get cooking good enough for Mr. Stoner after the way he’s been spoiled by you. I must get some of your best receipts.”

“I always took great pride in my cooking, mem; but for sourcrout I can’t compare to you.”

“Dear, dear, how kind to say so,” and aside, “this old witch has some of the malicious spirit left in her

yet—I'm so relieved to think my son is well on his journey and out of harm's way."

"I'm glad your satisfied, but it's a parlos thing for a green young man from the country to go traveling alone around the world. He might lose his way and never get home again."

"Jacob has too much sense to lose his."

"True for you, ma'am; he never got lost around here, and yet I doubt if he ever spent a night at home lately."

"Well, he was never far away, and always in good company."

"There, la! you don't suppose he was here all the time. How wicked it is for young men to deceive their mothers so."

"You're only saying that to frighten me, Charity."

"Well, mem, I'm glad you have such confidence—maybe it's the best—but for my part I never think a young man safe until he's fairly married."

"You wouldn't have him marry a poor girl, I hope."

"Sometimes a poor one, who will save money, is worth more than a rich one to throw it away."

"There's a good deal in that—perhaps I did wrong to oppose Helen so stoutly. I miss my darling greatly."

"Well, mem, it's well he escaped Helen. She'd make his money fly."

"It's hard to say; Julianna was my choice, but Jacob didn't seem to take to her."

"You may be mistaken, mem; the last thing he told me was he was going to surprise us by marryin' soon. I pray heaven he don't fall into the hands of some

worthless huzzy and bring home a wife both poor and ornery. Now, Helen, at least has good blood."

"Well, so has Julianna, and money besides—but"—doubtfully—"you didn't like her."

"Oh, I declare to goodness, I admired her of all things; she had but one fault, she was too rich."

"Well, it's a great trial to have such a son and have all the young girls after him."

"Yes, mem, but he may escape the young girls if you can keep him clear o' the widders."

"Spiteful old heathen," thought Mrs. Stoner, as she drove home, "and it's a blessing I don't need her services any more."

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Jacob, supposed by his doting mother to be far away on his route East, was quietly enjoying himself in Portland. As he remarked to our friends, if he was to see the world it was best to commence at his home city.

He had fallen in with a very sociable young gentleman of Portland, who also was about to make the grand tour. He explained to Mr. Pepper how advantageous it would be for them to travel in company—not only increasing greatly their pleasures, but materially reducing the cost of traveling by sharing the expenses in common. Unfortunately he was not quite ready to start, if Mr. Pepper could only manage to wait for him. Mr. Pepper could easily wait. He would wait any length of time to oblige such a friend.

Meantime, he must write his first letter to his

mother. He hadn't much news to give her, but she would be delighted to hear of his new companion, and this economical method of saving expenses. It wasn't necessary to worry her by saying anything about the delay in Portland, so he would leave off the date from his letter. The dear old mother would never notice it.

* * * * *

"Here's a letter from Jacob," said Mr. Stoner, a few evenings later, handing it to his wife.

"DEAREST MOTHER,—

"I'm well and hasten to inform you of a splendid plan I've made that will add immensely to the pleasure of my trip and actually save money at the same time. I'm to have a traveling companion for the whole journey—most agreeable person, and you know in many things the cost is no more for two than for one. Have had an awful good time so far—had no idea there was so much pleasure in traveling.

"In haste,

"Your affectionate son,

"JACOB."

The farmer quietly enjoyed his supper while his wife puzzled over her letter.

"You'll have many delightful letters from Jacob," he remarked, "and his descriptions of the different countries will be quite entertaining."

Mrs. Stoner made no reply. She read her letter through a great many times, but could make nothing of it.

"Well, Sarah! what's the news from Jacob?"

"There don't seem to be much news—says he finds traveling great pleasure—says he's saving money—here, you read it yourself, Mr. Stoner. I can't quite make out what the boy means. He ought to give us the latest news, and say what place he's writing from."

"Oh, here's the envelope," said Mr. Stoner, "that tells where he posted it."

He looked at the envelope in surprise; and then hastily read the letter. He wiped his old silver-rimmed spectacles and took another amazed survey of the envelope, and read the letter over two or three times.

"Just so!" said his wife. "I couldn't understand it either, but there's not much news in it."

"Well, I think, Sarah, if you'll read it over carefully and examine the postmark on the envelope you'll discover it contains tremendous news."

Mr. Stoner saw through the whole thing, and was very sorry. It would be a bitter disappointment for his wife, and there was no telling how she would take it. However, he determined to let her find it out for herself.

"I don't understand. I didn't know he went through Portland,"—with that delightful ignorance of geography so natural to some women.

"Neither he does, if he wants to find his way East. Portland is exactly out of his way."

"I see through it—the scamp. I wondered he went

off satisfied with such a brief good-by from the young people. He intended all the time to see them again." Mrs. Stoner smiled as she thought of his innocent trick and what a dear boy he was and how fond of all his friends.

"Just so!" remarked Mr. Stoner.

"And how lucky," exclaimed Mrs. Stoner; "to find some one to share his traveling expenses."

"He doesn't say that, my dear. He writes some of the expenses are no greater for two than one. For instance, one person would require a room to himself, while a man and his wife wants no more."

"Yes, that's very true."

"Well, what conclusion do you draw?"

"Mr. Stoner, what are you talking about?" cried his wife, jumping up and overturning the chair in her excitement.

"My dear wife," said Mr. Stoner, solemnly, "I must caution you strongly to bear this in mind: whatever your son does it's your duty to make the best of it. He is no longer an infant in arms, and must judge for himself, especially on the subject of choosing a partner for life. His choice must come first, and you must be satisfied to approve, unless there are insurmountable objections."

Mrs. Stoner made no reply. She gathered up the letter and envelope and hurried from the room.

"It's better so," observed the old gentleman to himself. "She's a sensible woman, and a wise woman. Let her have a good cry over the disappointment, and she'll come round all right. It was a shrewd trick of

those children, but he'll make her a fine husband, and he could never find a more suitable wife."

An hour later Mrs. Stoner returned, the traces of tears still visible. She sat down quietly in her comfortable chair, and nothing was said for a long time.

Mr. Stoner was a firm believer in the power of silence, and often made arguments of great weight without opening his mouth.

* * * * *

"The bitterest thing about the whole business, Mr. Stoner, is to think that old heathen knew it all the time, and was actually behaving herself with decency for joy in the satisfaction of deceiving me; and to think of all the good words and presents I've given her. I can forgive Jacob anything, for I know what you have said is right. It's the only thing and the wise thing for me to do; and Helen, I can forgive her—she has behaved well, and barring poverty, I know she'll make him a splendid wife; but I'll never forgive that old witch, and would give a good deal to get even with her."

"I'll tell you, my dear, how to get even with her and ahead of her too. Just make the best of it: make her think you're delighted and it's all turned out exactly as you wished."

There was a long silence. It was an awful trial to the old lady, but she was a woman of too much good sense to hang out and make trouble after she was defeated.

"You're right, my dear husband. I will make the best of it. I'll go over in the morning and tell Charity the news and how charmed I am with the whole thing"

—after a long pause—“yes, that’s all that’s left for me to do—to make the best of it. If the fat’s all in the fire I don’t see any use in spending all that money in foreign travel. They might just as well come home at once. I miss my boy dreadfully. What do you think?”

“You’re right, my dear. The reasons for their travel at present are all done away with, and I believe they would prefer to return and settle down quietly. But if you want them you should write at once or they may be out of reach.”

“Well, write a letter, Mr. Stoner, and ask them to come home right away.”

“No, my dear wife, it’s your affair, and if you want them back and feel able to receive and forgive them, you must write your own letter.”

Thus pressed, Mrs. Stoner betook herself to her writing table, and after an hour’s labor and many trials and tears, submitted the letter to her husband.

“I little expected, Mr. Stoner, to write such a letter as that, but I’m going to bear it without complaint.”

“Oakland, ——

“DEAR JACOB,—

“I have your letter and won’t deny it has cost me many tears. I was shocked to find you were still at Portland. It was very wrong to deceive your poor mother so. If you are determined to have a wife of your own choosing I may say there isn’t a girl in the State I can welcome so heartily as dear Helen. She has behaved nobly through the whole thing. Don’t spend your money traveling. I miss you so much. Come back to

your old mother, and bring your dear wife with you. I'll be a good, kind, loving mother to her, as I'm sure she'll be a good wife to you and a dear daughter to me. Now that it's settled, I am willing to say I think it all for the best, indeed am glad of it. Kiss dear Helen for me and hurry home. Come home at once, my dear children, to your

“Affectionate mother,

“S. S.”

Mrs. Stoner sighed as she handed over the letter to be mailed. “But I'll tell Charity I planned the whole thing myself. I'll have that much satisfaction over her.”

* * * * *

This letter found our friends seated at the breakfast table at the Portland Hotel. After Mr. Pepper had devoured it a sufficient number of times to get the contents through his head, he laid back in his chair and burst into a roar, so loud, so tremendous, it fairly shook the dishes and caused unbounded surprise to the whole room.

“Hush! hush! Mr. Pepper—Jacob—for heaven's sake,” they all cried at him. “You're attracting the attention of the whole company.”

“What in the world have you found that's so funny?” inquired Helen.

“Mrs. John Jacob Pepper,” he said, “read that letter,” handing it over to her.

Helen was greatly agitated at this speech, and read

the letter as well as her blushes and beating heart would permit. Alice read it over Helen's shoulder, and was wonderfully moved. "It's a miracle," she whispered. They were all astonished, and the universal question was how in the world did he gain his mother's consent. But Mr. Pepper declined any explanation. He was to get her consent, her approbation, and could Helen demand a handsomer letter? The truth is it was just as much of a mystery to Jacob as to the others, but he was firm to take advantage of it before any unpleasant explanations turned up.

Mr. Pepper demanded the immediate fulfilment of the agreement. He had Helen's solemn promise—he had submitted like a lamb. Protests and prayers for delay were equally unavailing. No questions of the necessary preparations should have an instant's consideration. There was but one thing to be settled and he would leave the decision of that to Helen. It was her right to name the hour. Should he bring a clergyman to the hotel in half an hour, or would they all go comfortably together and call at his house in a quarter of an hour? He was willing to wait her own time and let her have it all her own way, and she could just take her choice between those two excellent plans.

* * * * *

The very next morning found the whole party on their way back to Oakland, Mr. Pepper and his wife on the best of terms with themselves and all the world, and Edward exactly the reverse.

He was more determined now than ever to secure

Alice for his wife, and was by no means pleased with her careful avoidance of any return to that subject.

“Edward,” said the young Mrs. Pepper, taking him to one side on the boat, “why persist in pressing your suit on Alice, now? Don’t you see you are making her very unhappy, and can never gain her consent in that manner. She wants to treat you well, and is very fond of you as her cousin. There’s no telling what might be the result if you were only content to wait patiently; but if you press and annoy her so now, you will certainly throw away every chance you might have.”

“It’s all very well for you to preach patience to me after such a hasty marriage yourself, almost an elopement.”

“Very well, Edward, I’m not going to take offense at anything you say. You don’t envy me my happiness, I hope? I’m sure I’d do anything in my power to promote yours. The advice I give you is based on what I know—Alice will not accept you now.”

“Suppose I follow your advice, how long must I wait?”

“That I cannot answer, but am satisfied your only chance for the future is to drop the subject entirely for the present. Can’t you see how low-spirited she is in spite of all her attempts at cheerfulness? She has been under great mental distress during the past year. She feels the marriage of her father, and it will take her a long time to get over the sad death of poor Lucy.

“That is one reason that John and I are going back to live with her. It would never do to have her live alone. and would be worse to have her go to Mrs. Stoner’s, and

by our living with her you can still have your home in the old house. Don't you see how nicely it will all be arranged?"

"No, I don't; if she would stop her nonsense and marry me at once it would all be arranged a great deal better."

"She won't marry you at once, and you may as well save your temper; besides, if you make yourself unpleasant to her it will end in your leaving the house."

"It's my belief she's after some other man."

"She's not a girl who would be after any man, and you know as well as I there's no man around after her. Now we'll end it. I've given you the best advice, and you may follow it or not. I will not mention the subject again."

Helen, having as she hoped silenced Edward, took the first opportunity of having a quiet talk with Alice.

"My dear, sweet cousin," she said, taking her tenderly by the hand, "why are you so down-hearted? Pray cheer up and look a little like yourself or I'll begin to think you envy me my happiness."

"No, Helen, you know better than that; but I can't deny I am very miserable."

"Dear Alice, won't you confide in me and let me try to comfort you?"

"There's none but you I could confide in, but no one can give me any comfort here."

"Tell me, dear heart, does Edward annoy you by his attentions; if so he must be sent away. My sweet girl must not be made unhappy by the unreasonableness of any man."

"He does make it unpleasant sometimes, but please don't say anything about it. You must not interfere. I can stand it."

"Alice, dear cousin, tell me is it any other man?" Helen was beginning to feel uncomfortable. What if Alice was in love with Mr. Pepper—her life-long friend, and to whom she had almost been married. Such a thing would be a most frightful termination of all her happiness.

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"Tell me, dear Alice, is it the doctor?"

"Oh, Helen! how can you be so foolish?" exclaimed Alice, with a sad smile; "but believe me, dear cousin, I must keep this trouble to myself; no one can share it with me. To tell this sad story would only distress you and be no relief to me. It's my own burden, let me bear the sorrow in secret."

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"Then, Alice," said Helen—with bowed head and trembling lips—"I know the awful truth. Why! oh, why! did you let me marry him, if you felt that way? Better, a thousand times better, to have married him yourself. It was your duty to him, to yourself. Now see where you have placed us all. Where is any happiness left for me in this world?"

"Oh, Helen, Helen, stop. It is not that; indeed, indeed it is not."

"Alice!" pushing her away—"there is no need of any more deception. Let me go away now and think

of my sorrows. It appears my joys are of very brief duration. You are much to blame. It would have been more honest to let me know the truth before it was too late. I know very well when John comes to hear this, how it will destroy his happiness. He loved you first and he loves you still."

"Helen!" holding her by the dress; "wait one second—let me—think—I can bear this no longer. Here, read this letter. It is the last. It will explain all—show how mistaken you are. It is all over now—I thought to keep this grief to myself—read and see what a weak woman I am."

Helen's heart fluttered between supremest joy and heaviest sorrow. If this great misfortune was not to overcome them, then indeed there might be left for her many days of happiness yet; but the pitiful, despondent tones of Alice warned her of some new and serious trouble impending. She turned the letter over and over, and at last whispered: "Tell me, Alice, what it is—I cannot read—it's all a blur to me."

"No need to read it—enough to know it's from John Devine."

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Helen made no reply; she was too amazed for speech. The thought rushed through her mind—her own future was safe, but what was before poor Alice?

XXI.

"THERE, dear Alice, don't take it so much to heart. If, as you say, it's all over, there's no harm done. Let us forget all about him."

"How can I forget him with dear Lucy's words ringing in my ears?"

"Oh, Helen, I want to do my duty to Lucy, and to father, and to him. Whatever I do seems wrong, and whatever I refuse seems wrong. Between it all I am torn to pieces. Tell me, dear cousin, if you can, is there a right way in it. If I cast him off, Lucy's dying words reproach me. If I give him any encouragement I know it will distress poor father beyond measure."

"What does he want you to do?"

"Why need to ask that?"

"Then, sweet cousin, let me ask another question. What does your heart want you to do?"

"I forgive him. I pity him. I would do all in my power (except that) to heal his broken spirit. Think, dear Helen, how much greater his loss than ours. You have lost a cousin, I a sweet sister, father a lovely, devoted daughter, but he—he has lost his love, his wife!"

"Don't give way so, dear Alice. Let us talk it over calmly, and see if there is not some way out of this trouble. I'm sure there is, if you will only be sensible."

"There now, you're going to scold me. Pray be

merciful. Dear Helen, love me—don't scold me. I'm so miserable, so faint and weary. This thing is just killing me."

"Dear cousin, I don't censure you in the least. I have no right to find fault with you. Surely you may receive a letter from your own brother, if you wish."

"When he writes to me I have to answer it. He just makes me. If I wouldn't answer, he said he must come on to see me; and you know that would have distressed father far more."

"Then you have been corresponding with him?"

"Well, some letters have passed between us."

"How many, for instance?"

"No, I won't tell you that. You have no right to ask that."

"How did you manage? The letters were never noticed."

"I won't tell you any more. I couldn't distress father, and every letter I intended should be the last. But he wouldn't stop, and father abhors him so I never dared to say anything about it."

"And you went down to Portland to meet him under pretense of taking care of your cousin? Oh, you deceitful girl!"

The quiet smile that passed between them here relieved a little the painful situation.

"He promised me solemnly, if I would see him, he would agree to do anything I said, no matter what."

"So you met him when we thought you were out taking quiet walks."

"Yes, I met him, and broke it all off, and there's an

end of it. He agrees to make no farther attempt to see me or correspond with me. Now it's all settled, I feel easy in my mind."

"Yes, you appear to be."

"Oh, Helen," throwing herself into her cousin's arms, "I'm the most wretched girl in the world. When he sees me he thinks it's Lucy. He's just wild with love, frantic with despair."

"But is all over now?"

"Yes, it's all over, but he wants father to know that he is an honorable young man of good family, and has recently come into large inheritance. He has given me a lot of papers to prove all he says, and begs me to show them to papa, but I dare not. He would never forgive me, if he knew I had any intercourse with Devine. My first duty now is to papa. There can be no mistake about that."

"That is the meaning of all this agitation and depression?"

"The whole thing has caused me much painful, anxious thought, but now it's all settled, I feel easy," bursting into tears.

"Alice, answer me this one question. Do you love him? Let me know the truth."

"Could I love a man who has caused the death of my sister, and who is hated by my father and all my friends?"

"Then, dear, you should not be worried any more about him. Return those papers, shake him off, dismiss the subject from your mind and have done with it. Promise me you will do it."

"Can I be so cruel to one who loved Lucy so passionately and who feels her untimely loss more than any of us, and after Lucy's last words to me? Helen, I am powerless to treat him so unkindly. I cannot but pity him."

"Say no more. I understand it all."

"Then, Helen, you know more than I, and that's the truth; but you are mistaken if you think I love him. Only this, I cannot refuse to sympathize with my brother-in-law so utterly cast down and miserable. Although he has been wild and committed this awful wrong, now he deplores his conduct with repentance and deep remorse. You must believe in justice, even to an enemy, and he is no enemy. You must believe in repentance and forgiveness. You won't deny your creed."

"Yes, I believe in forgiveness and avoidance, under some circumstances. You say it is all over and done with, and yet you go on repeating the arguments in his favor. That is not the way to keep it settled. It will never stay done with if you are going to keep on turning the whole subject over all the time in your mind."

"Cruel, cruel, unkind, hard-hearted cousin, you say you love me, but you only want to put me in the wrong."

"Very well. What next?"

"What next?"

"Yes, Alice, you must ask and answer that question. You cannot bring him back to make peace with your father, unless you are prepared to go farther. You

know what he will expect if he is received even on a footing of coldest sufferance."

"People's expectations are but seldom realized in this world."

"Well, dear Alice, I only want you to see clearly the way you are going, and don't make the trouble worse by any mistakes that are avoidable. I know what will happen. Your sense of justice and pity will plead with your father to look into those papers and permit Devine to come and crave his pardon. Your father can refuse you nothing. He will object, but finally give in. Distressful scenes must take place between you before this much is gained. Devine, having come for this visit of a day, will never leave you,—never. It is plain he loved and fairly worshiped your sister, and when he sees you it's just the same as if his dear wife were yet alive. I don't wonder he is frantic after you. I don't wonder he loves you to desperation. He would be more or less than mortal if it were otherwise, and I can understand easily, too, you and your sister being so much alike in mind as well as body, that whatever it was in this man that attracted Lucy draws you also towards him. And now, dear Alice, to conclude this story, if you are prepared for the end he expects, the only ending that will content him, then proceed. The way is clear, and I see no reason why it should not secure the happiness of all. As to your father—your happiness is his. But if you can go no farther than to receive and treat him as a brother—if that is your idea, and your mind rebels at anything beyond, then I say beware! If you go a step farther on this road you

only pile up misery two-fold; and above all, you will do him an injustice beyond compare, greater than anything he is now resting under. Dear Alice, don't tremble so. Lie quietly here in my arms. I am not scolding. I love you too much to say one word that would offend your gentle ear, but now, while we are on the subject, I think it wise and necessary for your ease of mind that some conclusion should be reached. If you are prepared to have him come after what I have said, and understanding fully the only result that must follow, then by all means let it be so; and let us set about gaining your father over the moment we get home; but if it is to be all over and done with and settled, then put it all out of your mind and let us never talk about him or his concerns again. Even if this is a struggle for you, it's wiser and safer to undertake the task now before the burden becomes too great to bear. This much you know and feel, sweet cousin; without my assurance, that whatever you decide or wish to do you have now and always my strongest aid, my warmest love."

Helen said no more. She held her cousin in her arms with strong and loving embrace. She could not foresee how this would end, and in the bottom and under all her advice ran the fear and doubt that, from what she had heard of the character of young Devine, he was not the man who could make such a woman as Alice happy. The loose and easy motion of a man of the world would always go contrary to the pure and innocent feelings of this honest girl. However, it was all beyond her control. Let come what might, she could only go with the tide—filled with sorrow and dread.

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At length Alice raised up and gave Helen a warm kiss. "It's a great comfort, dear Helen, to have such a safe and sensible cousin by me. Your talk has settled my mind and enabled me to decide clearly what I must do."

Helen returned the kiss with affectionate warmth, but waited silently to hear the decision. Her say was finished, and she had very little doubt as to what the end would be. It was just as natural for young Devine, left friendless and desolate, to cling with frantic devotion to this living image of his lost bride as it was for this sweet young girl to listen to the pleadings of love.

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"Helen, we will never mention the subject again, and I will dismiss him and his concern from my mind."

As our friends were driving home from the station, whom should they meet riding comfortably together but Doctor Little and his bride.

"Hello! hello!" cried the doctor in high spirits. "What's this we see? I thought, Mr. Pepper, you were off on a long trip."

"Only went to Portland to get married. Thought we'd give you a little surprise."

The doctor and his wife stood up in the buggy, fairly astounded. Mr. Pepper chuckled with delight.

"Neat, wasn't it, and highly agreeable."

"Yes, it was neat. We are quite surprised. We've

been doing a little surprise ourselves while you were away. Allow me to introduce Mrs. Doctor Little."

"No!" shouted the whole four in one breath.

"Yes," replied the doctor gravely. "Don't see that you got ahead of us much on the surprise. We didn't take the trouble to go all the way to Portland. Just a little home surprise, and, as Mr. Pepper says, highly agreeable. Is it not so, Julia?"

"Sit down, sir, and drive on. Don't you see you are raising the whole town?"

Then followed great laughing and immense congratulations.

As they drove on, Helen said, "Cousin Edward, it appears you're too slow for these Western girls."

"Well, it seems, Cousin Helen, that you're quick enough for the men."

* * * * *

The returning travelers were received at home with immense delight. What excitement, what joy, what congratulations. Mrs. Stoner, having resolved to make the best of it from necessity, now found to her surprise she was making the best of it from choice. She was glad to admit that Jacob was right, and had secured the dearest and best wife. On his part he could not sufficiently thank his good mother for giving up her dearest wishes to secure his content.

"Well, Jacob, I don't want more credit than I deserve, but what was the use in making trouble after you were married?"

Here followed explanations, and there was great fun

at Mrs. Stoner's expense when the whole story came out.

A few weeks later we find all settled down to their regular pursuits.

Mr. Stoner retired from active affairs and gave his business over into the hands of his nephew, so at last the young man was in a position to begin the accumulation of the dear money he loved so well. Now, being well satisfied with himself and his prospects, and having made such poor progress with the girls, he turned woman-hater, and congratulated himself on his many narrow escapes from their wiles. He could look forward to a life of tranquillity, with none to worry or molest him. He declared he was not sentimental or poetical, but was willing to admit one real poet had lived—Coleridge—and had written one real scrap of poetry which he loved to quote:—

“ Sly Beelzebub took all occasions
To try Job's constancy and patience.
He took his honor, took his health ;
He took his children, took his wealth ;
His servants, oxen, horses, cows ;
But cunning Satan did *not* take his spouse.

“ But heaven, that brings out good from evil,
And loves to disappoint the devil,
Had predetermined to restore
Twofold all he had before :
His servants, horses, oxen, cows—
Short-sighted devil *not* to take his spouse.”

Here, he declared, to the disgust of the ladies, was true poetry, founded on Bible facts and telling of the mysterious doings of the outer world. It showed the

triumph of good over evil, and how handsomely heaven was ready to reward the good, not in promises, but with a clean hundred per cent. in property; finally, the moral was plain, the greatest torment of a man was a wife.

Mrs. Stoner had the young people to supper one evening, and after the fun and frolic was over Mr. Stoner called them to be quiet for a little serious talk.

When they were all seated around him, the old gentleman remarked, "I have often noticed how much trouble and dissensions among friends and relations comes from property and the settlement of estates. I need not say how it warms my heart to see you all so happy and such dear friends. To save any shadow of unkind feeling hereafter, my good wife and myself have resolved that, as there is a good deal of wealth to be disposed of and some mixing among our families, we will settle it now and let you all know what to expect, so that if anything we propose is not entirely to the satisfaction of each we may know and rectify it while we are all together, and it can be done with the best feelings. I have divided my estate into three equal portions. The one I leave to my dear daughter, and that she may learn how to handle money while she is young, I will arrange to pay over the income of this portion at once to the bank in Oakland; a second portion I leave to my nephew, Edward, whom I regard as my son. The last I set aside to found a hospital in memory—in memory of——"

"Yes, father, we understand," said Alice.

The old gentleman wiped his eyes and gave his dear daughter a kiss.

"As to my dear wife, as any more money would only annoy her, I leave her only my old Bible and my love. Now, let me hear if all are satisfied."

"It is just as we have agreed," said Mrs. Stoner. "My good husband and myself, for evident reasons, will not leave any of our property to each other."

"Uncle," said Edward, as the old gentleman looked towards him, "I can never sufficiently repay you. It is much more than I had any right to expect."

Then he looked, oh, so kindly, at his daughter.

"If you do not think it right, my love, speak out. You are the first one to be satisfied."

"Papa," she replied, looking at him with a saucy smile, "you may fix your old papers any way you please to suit yourself, but don't think you'll get rid of me that way. When I want any money, I'll go to the same old pocket that always supplied me."

"I," said Mrs. Stoner, "leave my husband my love. I cut my naughty son, Jacob, off with only the old gold watch I always carry, and I leave all of my estate of whatever kind to my dear and only daughter, Helen."

"Ah, mother!" cried Jacob, "you know how to gratify your boy. You couldn't have done anything to please me better."

Helen kissed the old lady, with a thankful heart at this mark of complete reconciliation. "You give me all, mother. I at least have no chance to object."

"Well," said Mrs. Doctor Little, "since you are all arranging your money affairs, I will mention my gift

of a round sum in bonds to my dear husband, so the income will supply him with ample funds without bothering his poor wife." Here she could not refrain from a great burst of laughter, and went up boldly and gave her husband such a sounding kiss it made the doctor fairly blush. She gloried in her love, and didn't care who knew it.

And now, having brought all our characters to this happy state, we may bid them farewell, wishing them long and prosperous lives. We have married off all those we could, and provided for those we could not.

Here are Mr. and Mrs. Stoner, happy in good health, ample wealth and the harmonious and prosperous family and friends around them.

Here are Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Pepper happy in the possession of all that goes to make a young married couple happy. They could ask for nothing but a continuance of these abundant blessings.

Here is Mrs. Doctor Little happy in escaping those matrimonial snares which surrounded her, and the doctor himself happy in the management of an estate and in the society of a lively, good-humored and affectionate wife.

Edward happy in escaping the perils of women, and in his present prosperity and bright prospects for the future.

Alice must be happy, now that all is over and her mind is at rest.

As for that young scamp, Devine, we dismiss him to his own devices. He has no right to demand happiness from us.

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“We are all happy who are here present,” said Mr. Stoner, with a sigh. The thought of his absent Lucy was always with him.

“May we not believe, dear father, that all of us are happy?”

XXII.

BUT what is the matter with old Charity? We cannot close our story, leaving this faithful old servant unhappy. The reason of her discontent is easily discovered. Her one object in life—the beginning and end of everything to her—her baby—child—her Alice—won't eat. This may appear a small matter to some; to Charity it simply jarred the wheels of the universe. For her there was but one person living; for that one to refuse food meant sickness, death, the end of the world.

She worried Mrs. Pepper about it, but Helen was too wise to notice. "She has been greatly disturbed, Charity, in many ways. Give her time, don't worry her, and she'll come round all right." Helen was very anxious, but felt there was nothing to be done but wait and hope that the dear girl's good sense and strong constitution would restore her mind and confirm her health.

But Charity had no mind to trust to time when the health of her treasure was at stake. In this extremity hostilities were suspended, and she consulted her particular enemy.

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"Mr. Stoner," said his wife to him one evening, "have you noticed how poorly Alice is looking?"

"Not at all," he exclaimed, taking alarm at once. "You surprise me greatly. I thought she appeared in such good health and spirits."

"There may be no ground of fear; but Charity says she hardly eats anything, and is in a great way about it."

"Sarah, if anything happens to Alice I can never hold up my head again."

"There you go. Just like a man. You don't know there's the least danger; only such things should be taken in time. It's evident to me she's not well and appears distressed in her mind. I think Helen knows what is the matter, but don't want to say. No, Mr. Stoner, you can't drive over to-night. That would only excite her and make matters worse."

Mr. Stoner passed a sleepless night. In the morning he was ready to be off bright and early.

"Now, my dear, don't blurt out anything to frighten the girl. Just talk to her quietly and find out what is the matter."

"My love, she feels very much the loss of her sister."

"Yes, but she was getting over that. There's some new trouble, you may depend. If you can get her to confide in you, we can understand what's best to be done."

But his wife did not understand on what tender and intimate terms her husband stood with his daughter. Immediately on his arrival he took Alice to one side. and after an affectionate kiss, said, "Now tell me, my dear, what is the matter. You are not looking in

your usual health. You must not conceal anything that troubles you in mind or body from me."

There was a long silence. Alice, startled at first by her father's words, now resolved, as he had invited her confidence, to go through with it.

"Father, there is something that troubles me very much. I have not mentioned it, because I was afraid it might distress you."

"That is not like my own Alice. You know, my love, my chief pleasure is in ministering to your happiness. If anything troubles you, it must be cured at once."

"Well, papa, I must tell you—I met—I saw——"

"Yes, dear, go on."

"Well, you know, papa, we were in Portland lately——"

"I haven't forgotten it. Go on, dear."

"Mr. Devine was there,"—and now, as she had made the plunge and saw how quickly her father drew up in anger, she hurried on with her story. "Yes, dear papa, he is in deep distress."

"I don't wonder. It will take more than that to cure the ills he has brought upon us."

"Father, he wants you to know he is not a worthless, idle young fellow. He handed me some papers which he asks you to investigate. He begged me to give them to you, but I have been hesitating."

"My dear child, you showed your good sense. I don't want to know anything about him. If he will only do us the great favor to keep away and let us alone, I will ask nothing more. After the heavy sorrow his

rash impudence—to call it by no harsher name—has brought on us all, the least he can do is to grant this simple request.”

“He thought, father, it was due to you to show he was not unworthy to be your son. Excepting that one act, which has caused him the most dreadful grief and remorse.”

“I hope, Alice, you are not prepared to take his part or have any intercourse or correspondence with him. A more dastardly act was never committed, nor one followed by more frightful consequences. Never let me see his face nor hear his hateful name again.”

Here her father, bursting with anger, broke out into a tirade of abuse and bad language that shocked Alice beyond measure. Never had she heard the dear man talk in that manner.

She could only stand silently by, while tears of fright and sorrow rolled down her cheeks.

“I’m thankful, my dear child, you feel just as I do about this horrible man. You can just return the papers, and let him understand in unequivocal terms the one favor we demand of him.”

When her father quieted down, Alice said, “Dear papa, that is not like you. I thought you would always be willing to forgive any—even the greatest injury. He implores your forgiveness.”

“And he’s made you his envoy?”

“Yes, father, I could not refuse him, for Lucy’s sake.”

“Very well, Alice. I suppose we must not shirk our

duty. So let him know I forgive him, and pray the Lord I may never see him or hear of him again."

"Father, I don't call that forgiveness at all."

"Well, well, child, let that be the end of it, and now I hope, dear Alice, you have this off your mind, you will quickly regain your usual health and cheerfulness."

She could make no answer, just kissed her father tenderly and walked quietly away. When out of his sight she fled to her room.

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Mr. Stoner was greatly relieved at finding out and settling so easily the troubles of his dear Alice. He was thankful that the womanly penetration of his wife had discovered the evil and given him the opportunity to heal the wound in good time.

"She is that sweet and tender-hearted," said Mrs. Stone, "she can't help pitying and sympathizing with that fellow, and I'm only too glad you have had a chance to put an end to him before he worried her sick. The dear child has had trouble enough without carrying along the sins of that man."

Alice, feeling a little out of sorts, did not come down to dinner. Helen took her up a lunch and sat quietly in her room, without even asking a question. Happy the sick blessed with a nurse who knows when to hold her tongue. Helen felt this was a trouble that Alice must settle for herself, and all further words of advice or sympathy were out of place.

"Helen, you remember the subject we were not to speak about again?"

"Yes, dear, I know what you mean."

"Well, I'll mention it now to say it's all settled, and my mind's at rest at last."

"Dear Alice, I'm very thankful."

"Yes, I talked with papa this morning about it. He forgives him."

"Oh! Well, do I understand he is to be received here and all that?"

"Oh no, no; father forgives him, but he's awfully angry at him. I never saw papa so violent. But that settles it. I know my duty, and I hope I am able to do it. My heart bleeds for poor John. It will be sorry news for him when he gets his papers back. He'll know it's my final farewell. But he ought to be prepared for it. I never wrote him a letter but I said how certain I felt papa would never be able to endure his presence, and I made him understand distinctly my first duty was to papa. Yes, Helen, I know you will agree with me there—the first duty of a daughter is to her father. John never agreed to this opinion very kindly. He sometimes writes, 'your letter containing oceans of duty and a small dampness of love,' or 'I've searched through your *dutiful* letter for one drop of comfort.' He is very witty, John is, and full of fun, when not under the cloud of misfortunes. I wish, Helen, you knew him better. You would like him, I'm sure. You're not frowning, I hope, dear cousin? You cannot think it wrong for me to love my own brother. I'm sure I love John Jacob, and he is only a kind of a

brother. It's very sweet of you to let me love him, and to let him love me. We always did it, and it would only make trouble if we'd try to change now. We couldn't help it, you know. Well, well, I'm thankful it's all over and my mind relieved at last; but, oh, dear Helen, I must say I'm disappointed with papa, sorely disappointed. Now, you would have said, if ever there was a Christian it was the one thing in all the world I felt sure of; and here on the very first trial! Well, you'd have been shocked. At any rate it's a blessing it's all over. I'll send John back his papers this very day, and I won't write him a letter even with them—just a note—a line to let him know it's final. And now it's all over, I hope there's no harm in my letting him know I have always loved him—as a brother."

"Don't you think that would unsettle him?"

"No, Helen, you don't understand what a true man he is; and I have his promise, over and over, that if papa won't come round he'll go away. He knows I must do my duty to papa. He's an honorable man, and he'll go at once; but, oh, dear cousin, it breaks my heart to think how miserable he will be. Dear, dear, it almost shakes my faith in Christianity to think of papa's injustice."

"Oh, my dear, what are you saying?"

"Well, Helen, I only asked papa to pardon him. If I'd hinted even at John's wanting to pay us a visit, I don't think papa could have found words to express his wrath."

"Oh, and there was to be a little visit, too?"

"Helen, don't smile at me in that provoking manner."

What would be the use of papa's forgiveness if he was not to be allowed to visit his own relations?"

"Well, dear, don't frown at me. I have no objections to his visits. It all rests with yourself, and I understand uncle did forgive him."

"Yes he forgave him with a big D."

"I don't understand."

"Well, if you had heard papa, you would have understood perfectly. I'm thankful it's all settled and off my mind, and now I must try to eat more to satisfy poor Charity, and be more cheerful, to show papa how anxious I am to please him. What a blessed thing it is to have one's mind free from all disturbing thoughts. Kiss me now, dear cousin, and leave me alone a little. I will write John and return those papers and have done with it."

Alice concluded she must follow Helen's hint and keep the love out of her letter. She found a good deal of difficulty in composing a letter to please herself, but at last sent this:

"OAKLAND FARM.

"DEAR BROTHER,—

"I can feel deeply for your pain when you receive back these papers, which papa will not even look at. He forgives you, but that is all, and believe me, this is final. My feelings of duty will not permit me to write you as I wish. Now, dear John, good-by. Remember your promise.

"Your affectionate sister,

"ALICE."

Everything being thus settled comfortably, Alice took to her bed.

What was the dismay of her father next day to learn this fact from the tearful Helen.

"My dear child," cried the frightened father, hurrying to her room, "I'm so sorry. Why didn't you tell me yesterday you were not feeling well. I think we must send for old Doctor Squill's at once."

"Dear papa, I'm only tired. Just let me rest a day or two and I'll be all right."

Perhaps this brief letter which she received two days later retarded somewhat her convalescence, as it showed the troublesome subject which had all been so finally settled would not stay settled.

"PORTLAND.

"DEAR SISTER,—

"I received your letter enclosing papers. Before I can think of the matter as finally closed, I consider it my duty to ask your father's forgiveness in person. I will arrive at Oakland by *Wednesday morning's train* and walk out to the farm.

"Your affectionate brother,

"JOHN."

"Well, well," thought Alice as she read this letter for the tenth time, "it may be just as well to let him see for himself how impossible it is to move papa. I will go out to meet him and make it all clear. It's a blessing he takes it so coolly. I suppose it's the way

with the men. One day in a violent passion, and the next it's all over and forgotten. I wish I could shake it off so easily. But, of course, papa is right. It's much better that he kept away. If he was around here I know well enough how it would be. It would be just like Edward, only worse. He would always be after me to marry him, and I could never bring my mind to that."

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To Helen's infinite delight, Alice declared on Wednesday morning she felt much better. Thought she would take a little walk for change and exercise. No, she wanted no one with her. Would just walk a little way in the woods by the creek. If she felt tired she would rest on one of the benches by the water. She loved to hear the water rushing over the stones, and the shade of the great maple trees was so cool and refreshing.

Helen was quite unwilling to have her go alone, but as she insisted, thought it wise to let her have her own way.

When her father arrived, how his heart bounded for joy when he heard his precious child was so much better and out for a walk. "No, he mustn't go after her. Let her have the quiet walk to herself. He could wait here on the porch until she came back."

* * * * *

"Don't look so terrified, Alice. I have not come to torment you. I am not even here to see you; but you're

so kind to meet me. You're looking so faint and tired. Don't worry about me. I agreed that all should be over between us, and all is over. See how calmly I hold you by the hand—how coldly I say I hope you are all well. I am on a visit to Mr. Stoner. Yes, dear sister, don't tremble so as if you thought I wanted to quarrel with him. I have done him great, irreparable wrong. I want to confess my fault and implore his pardon. This is my duty; and the remorse I feel will never let me rest until I have performed it. If he will forgive me, it will lift a heavy burden from my heart; if not, I have only to go away and live on my life the best I may. I am his son; his daughter was my wife for a few brief days. Is there a nearer relationship than that?"

"John, listen to me. I came out to meet you and turn you back. To see you will only revive papa's sorrow, add bitterness to his resentment. Spare him this further grief. Let my forgiveness speak for both. Spare yourself his reproaches."

"Alice, I feel you have steeled your heart against me. You seem afraid to have me meet your father. He may be more gracious than his daughter. Why your feelings have changed, I do not know, but I have no right to complain. You have my promise. I am not one to persecute a woman with unwelcome attentions; above all, not you, Alice, to whom I owe so much. Far be it from me to press you for sympathy, or even bare friendship, when I see it only gives you pain. But whether you pity me, or despise, or hate me, I can do nothing but love you. You may control your feelings or change your affections; but whether present or ab-

sent I have no power to change my heart. But don't misunderstand me. I have business with your father. I come with no love-tale to a woman. I ask for no compassion from a woman. I make no appeal to the tender feelings of a woman. I come to entreat mercy and justice from a man. A woman must do her duty, though the heavens fall."

"John, do you want to kill me?" said Alice, burying her face in her handkerchief.

"Kill you? What are words to you? But you can't make me give up my love for you. Your heart may be harder than adamant, but you are the living image of one who loved me to the death."

"Oh, John, have mercy on me!"

"Enough! Will you help me with your father, or am I to be condemned and utterly cast off unheard? I will appeal to him by his sense of justice, and by the love he bore his lost Lucy, and by the sweet love she gave to me. This tender tie will touch his heart. He cannot tear the love of his dear daughter to shreds. He will forgive me for her sake."

"He sends you his forgiveness through me, and you know the conditions. You can surely grant him this small favor."

"A small favor! Just to keep away. That is the one thing you know that is the hardest of all to me; and yet you mention it with calm composure, as if it was some trivial matter. You almost drive me mad. I think I am beside myself—things are so confused I don't know what to make of them. You look like an angel of pity and love, but duty turns you to stone.

Don't you know there are other claims in this world beside duty? Oh, Alice, my life, my love, be stone no more."

Weak and faint, harassed with doubts, blinded with tears, she felt before her a strong man—his heart deeply stirred by conflicting emotions—demanding justice, entreating pardon, sighing for sympathy, frantic with love. One moment his eyes flashing with reproaches, the next his manly voice softened with pleadings. What was she to say to such a man? How stand against this impetuous nature? Did she love him, or was it fear? What did Lucy's last message mean? Had she a duty there as well as to her father?

He stood before her waiting for a reply. He took her by the hand. Was it to be their last farewell? Must he go away in anger? Her heart yearned to satisfy him. She could do nothing but tremble and hesitate in this crisis of her fate.

"Alice," he said, "I offer you my promise or my love. Which will you take?"

The pressure was too great. She could bear the strain no longer. Kindly Nature stepped in and relieved the pathos with a little humor.

"It appears to me," she said, her eyes twinkling, and her lips trembling with a little smile, "for one determined to stand to his promise, and whose business is only with a man, you have a good deal to say to a woman."

"Oh, Alice, if you laugh at me you'll set me crying." He fumbled nervously in his pockets, and then exclaimed, "Here, for heaven's sake, lend me a dry corner of your handkerchief."

The spell was broken—a glance—a smile—a laugh. She rushed into his arms and was fast locked in a loving embrace.

'Twas well this little scene occurred in a retired spot. O willows, hang your branches, and little bushes spread your leaves. Hide our lovers from the public view. What would the young gents of Oakland say if they caught a glimpse of this affair?

Later, a face smiling through tears came into view.

"Well, Miss Stoner, were you about to make a remark?"

"I was thinking, Mr. Devine, we're about in the same position as before, with papa's opposition like a mountain before us."

"Well, in my opinion our position has improved considerably."

No, we won't say how he convinced her of the correctness of his view. Such things are not interesting to outsiders.

"For instance, we have come to a unanimous decision as to what we want to do, and we're going to do it, come what may."

"Oh, dear, now I know what you're going to say; but don't say it. I must have papa's consent. I'll be miserable forever if you make me do anything to displease him."

"My love, you're quite wrong. What I was about to remark was that if your father won't consent now, I'll wait—seven years—for you, or longer, if considered advisable."

"But, dear John, I don't want to wait seven years.

I want it all settled and off my mind at once. This worry is hard to bear."

"Very good, come along, we can settle it in about half an hour. No, no, for goodness' sake don't begin to tremble. Only let me know what you want, I'm your obedient slave. I won't force your wishes, I won't even try to persuade you."

"About papa, what are you going to do? Nothing is settled until—until he says yes."

"Then, dear Alice, the best thing we can do is to go after him at once. Come, be brave, lean on me and see how I'll bring you off safe. Oh!—here he comes."

* * * * *

This part of our little drama was brought to a sudden conclusion in two brief acts.

Act 1st.—Presents a young gentleman of manly form—a beautiful young lady is leaning on his arm. A tall gray-haired old man is seen approaching in the distance.

Act 2d.—A young gentleman—of the same form—is seen standing in the road—stupefied with astonishment. An old man, with a beautiful young lady clinging to his arm, is about disappearing in the distance.

Well, what would you? Do you want this young man to bandy words with the one person he must conciliate? Do you want this sweet young girl, who loves her father dearly, to rebel against his orders? Do you want us to set down in cold English the words used by this good old man at a moment when he was heated with indignation and rage?

Poor young Devine, to wait and work so long, and all

his happiness comprised in one short hour. Poor angel, how quickly she was dragged down from those regions of bliss. She was so completely overwhelmed at the scene, she scarcely knew what was going on until she found herself half fainting in bed, and Helen, her faithful friend, weeping by her side. There, we know there are too many tears in this chapter; but what are women to do if men will be so violent? They have only their tears left.

* * * * *

"The idea!" said Mr. Stoner, flaming with wrath as he was giving an expurgated account of the scene to his wife.

"Well, my dear, you mustn't be harsh with Alice. She's not at all well."

"Never fear, good wife, I just took her home and she went quietly to bed, without a word—she's a sensible girl and knows it won't do. But I'm glad I had a chance to pack that scamp off, and now I'm thankful we're done with him." The good old man retired early and slept soundly under the influence of a very satisfactory day's work.

What was his consternation to hear John Jacob pounding on his door at break of day the next morning. They must come quick, both of them, Alice was sick, very sick, and Helen frightened to death.

The poor fellow burst into tears and blubbered and cried like a child as he told the story of the past night's doings. We believe there was no one loved that dear lady like that early and constant friend.

'And now what spasms of fear and pangs of remorse tortured the poor father. As long as he lived he never forgot the agony of that short drive.

Dr. Squills, being summoned in hot haste, declared it was only a little indigestion—system run-down, and all that. She would be all right in a few days. Helen, wild with fear and impatience, tapped her little feet while the old doctor expounded at large what should be done. At last she burst out: "Dr. Squills, can we have some one in consultation? You see how anxious we are. Doctor Little is a friend of the family and understands her constitution." She took the old doctor's look of surprise for consent, nor waited for words, but brought John Jacob's fast team into immediate service, and our little friend was whirled to the farmhouse before Dr. Squills recovered his self-possession.

The two doctors, after a visit to the sick room, retired to one end of the porch for private consultation. Helen gave them but a few moments' peace. She was satisfied herself what was the matter, and was determined that neither medical etiquette nor father's opposition should deter her from trying the remedy.

In a few words she told the story of the correspondence—the meeting—and the forced separation. Doctor Little seized the clue. John Jacob's fast team was again to the rescue, and young Devine reached the house before he was able to recover his astonishment.

The anxious father saw without a word the arrival of his hated son-in-law. Poor old man,—off in a corner by himself, scarcely noticing what was passing,—he was preparing his mind for that supremest anguish a parent

can be called upon to suffer. One look at the face of Alice was enough for him. It was Lucy's fate over again. There could be no hope of a different result.

Not a word was spoken as the carriage drove up. Helen came forward, and taking Devine by the hand, led him to the sick room, followed by the two doctors.

"Alice," exclaimed Helen in a cheerful voice, "here is a dear friend of yours come to see you. Rouse up and give him welcome."

Alice, startled by the words, gave a quick glance. It was enough—that look—that smile held a world of love. Devine, overcome with emotion, fell on his knees by the bed—what transport—what rapture is here—when doubts and despair fade away and rest and peace are at last assured.

And what shall be the reward of the young man who works a magic cure, and restores to her family this precious one, already considered lost?

Pardon — forgiveness — heartfelt thanks — complete reconcilliation:—These are all too small to satisfy so great a debt.

THE END.

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